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[No. 1

# Sewanee Review

JANUARY-MARCH, 1939

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# Sewanee Review

*La SEWANEE REVIEW fondée en 1892 ne peut rester ignorée de ceux qui s'intéressent au mouvement des idées en Amérique. La lecture de ce périodique trimestriel fera revenir plus d'un sur son opinion d'une Amérique exclusivement commerciale et philistine. C'est un spectacle reconfortant de voir un groupe d'américains sincères et cultivés lutter pour créer une tradition qui puisse sa force dans l'épanissement des plus hautes facultés de l'individu. Le combat est rude,..... mais il semble mené avec indépendance, enthousiasme et foi. La tâche de la revue est constructive et destructive, et alors son attitude est large et impersonnelle. ....*

*"Ce qui semble préoccuper surtout les collaborateurs de la SEWANEE REVIEW c'est la question du développement intégral de toutes les richesses potentielles de l'individu. Au nom de ce grand et noble principe ils s'en prendront à tout ce qui est étroit, mesquin, limité et à tout ce qui entrave le libre jeu de l'esprit."*

—F. DELATTE,  
*Revue belge de philologie.*



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*by Peter A. Carmichael*

## THE SOUTH—WHAT NOW?

FOR a generation or more it has been said by Southern men of affairs that the reason why the South remains undeveloped industrially and commercially is lack of capital. Before that, the explanation was that the Civil War had left us impoverished and spiritually broken, and sufficient time had not yet passed for revival to take place, though the war was then two generations in the past. If any scientific or strictly objective inquiry into causes was made after the war, until the studies of Professors Howard W. Odum and Rupert P. Vance, which are very recent, they evidently had no effect. Even the excellent and monumental works of these two writers, which ought to be studied by all Southern politicians and chamber of commerce entrepreneurs, are not concerned with critical analysis so much as with pure exposition.

Those among whom it has become a tradition to suppose that lack of capital holds the South back can scarcely have troubled themselves to consider what capital really is. They mean money in the bank. Their belief is that without that the South was bound, and still is, to occupy a decidedly minor industrial and commercial place. No doubt they have forgotten their history.

A little attention to it would acquaint them with the fact that the people who settled New England did not have money in the bank—the Mayflower immigrants, for example, were peasants and workmen—nor did those who settled California. It was the Southern colonial proprietors, very ironically, who had that. What the New Englanders and the Western pioneers had was something else: energy, initiative, ideas. It is these that capital consists of, not money in the bank. The latter is evidence of the prior existence of the former, but not proof or exactly a sign that they still exist. Investors put their money where it will earn, which means where the ability to create and carry on is the most ample and certain. The following example may be of interest in this connection.

During the World War an abandoned mill in one of the states of the Far South was reopened and put to work on the manufacture of munitions. Two chemists possessed of energy, initiative, and ideas, though not of funds, were among the men employed there. They saw an opportunity to smelt a certain alloy, then much needed and very profitable to make, and got permission to put in a small furnace for experimental purposes in an unused corner of the plant. The sum of \$2,500 was needed to finance this, and was unobtainable. The local banks, doubtless because of conservatism, which here would really mean a rather lazy indifference to experimentation and enterprise, would not make them a loan. More out of charity or sympathy with the ambitious than anything else, one of the bankers did personally lend them the money. It was not long until these men had moved out and started a plant of their own. After that they did not sit down and enjoy their rising incomes. They still had ideas and energy. They experimented with a variety of marketable chemical products, with highly successful results. In a few years this industry had become the largest employer in a town of 25,000 and was the pride and admiration of local business interests. Today it has no doubt made several fortunes, and I believe it has attracted Northern investors. But for the dynamic and intellectual resources of the men who started it, it would never have existed. Perhaps the reader will say they never would have got anywhere without the \$2,500. One may reply that the money did not come to them voluntarily, they went and got it and did things with it, and if the banker had not helped them,

they would have got it elsewhere or, perhaps, being resourceful men, would have got along without it. I believe the founder of one of the great tobacco fortunes in the South got his start in the latter way.

Before the depression a number of Southern communities put a surprising amount of money and cleverness into advertising themselves. The world was informed of immense natural resources here in the way of climate, water power, minerals, the soil, and what not. Note was made of the abundant supply of labor, which, it was pointed out, was native born and tractable. Although it is well known that the primary reason why Northern industry has moved south has been cheap, unorganized labor, the advertisers did not put the emphasis on that. They usually said that Southern labor was superior, but did not offer specifications.

In contrast to these claims about Southern workers a person of fair mind who is disposed to see the South's problems really met will not fail to realize that it is common understanding, north and south, that the majority of Southern labor is unskilled and that this is a reason why manufactures requiring intricate operations have not been the ones to come south. This is no reflection on Southern labor, for it could not be highly skilled when there were no employment opportunities to develop high skill. The textile industry is instructive in this connection. We have said a great deal about having gained a major part of this industry for the South. But we did not notice that what we got was principally the heavy lines, rather than the fine ones. While we make gray goods, rough cordages, netting, gingham, and the like, the East continues to produce the great bulk of expensive goods of all kinds.

It is evident that if we are to have high-class industry, we must do what we can to train native workers, and welcome the already trained ones from other regions. This must mean a more liberal policy toward organized labor, since all skilled labor is organized. The tactics followed in numerous localities, as for example, the one in Mississippi where they forcibly drove out an organizer, who happened to be a Southern woman of social position, are a sure method of preventing progress of any kind. Informed business men know there is no longer any sense in trying to block unions.

Informed business men also know that Southern climate, with

respect to the effect on labor, is not altogether to our advantage. While it is true that a worker needs fewer clothes, less fuel, and not so solidly built a house in the South, it is also true that the climate has an adverse effect on his productivity. The studies of Professor Ellsworth Huntington of Yale, who is an authority on human geography, indicate the optimum temperature for work to be from 40 to 60 degrees, and ours is much above that most of the year. If air conditioning spreads to factories as it has to stores, the time may come when Southern industry's climatic advantage will be offset by the fact that we have to pay about as much to keep cool in the summer as Northern manufacturers pay to keep warm in winter.

A far-sighted and economically sound policy will not be oblivious about these circumstances. On the contrary it will be fully informed and will be alert to find advantages to offset them. Such is by no means our present course. Because a good many Northern manufacturers have moved south in recent years, especially since the depression, we have somewhat naively decided that industry is on the march by virtue of natural conditions found here, and that we shall soon have it all over the place. Just what are the reasons for this migration? The well posted and business-like Southerner cannot fail to see that they are almost entirely labor reasons and the special inducements offered by states and localities. The same individual may reflect that if these were withdrawn, the new industry would be likely to depart. How long, then, can we expect to provide such advantages? Obviously the tax exemptions so lavishly allowed in the past few years cannot go on forever without a collapse in state and local services. Even more obviously, no state can hold very long to such a policy as Mississippi's of building free factories for the newcomers. Apparently we have forgotten the experience of the most industrialized Southern state, North Carolina, before and during the depression. Communities there had adopted the inducement policy quite extensively. When the pinch came they learned to their sorrow that their new-found friends were sometimes a pronounced liability. They paid no taxes but they consumed public services which others had to pay for, and then left their jobless, imported from the farms and mountains, to the care of the community. Enlightened reconsideration of the whole inducement

policy brought the realization that it is unjust and unwise to exempt the outsider and make your own local enterprise and citizenship pay his way. This realization was doubtless reinforced by the further realization that the beneficiaries of this policy are sometimes the fly-by-night species. According to the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development, the state now proceeds "on the theory that you do not get something for nothing, and that any reputable concern should be willing to pay its just proportion of the tax load."

But if it is short-sighted to coax the outsider on terms that may cost money and distress in the end, it is, if anything, even more unsound to tempt him by offering cheap, submissive labor. Only since the social-legislation program engendered by the depression has industry's southward trend become very marked. Of course the most conspicuous thing about this legislative program has been the labor laws, especially the Wagner Act. To escape the operation of the laws, and as far as possible to outdo the unions, certain types of employers have been moving to places where labor is unorganized and inexperienced and where it may be kept so for a time by the aid of pressure from local interests. Although the South is not the only place to which employers of this type have turned, it is the chief one. No doubt there are some of them, the more unscrupulous, who are realistic enough to see that the organization movement cannot be kept back many years and who will gamble on the prospect of its having established itself in the South just about the time the tax-exemption period expires. At that time, it may be surmised, labor conditions over the country will be more stabilized, and probably more equalized, and there will no longer be any marked advantage in being located in the South. Just then it will be the opportune thing to move out. A smart Yankee trick.

Honest and competently conducted industry is not likely to be shopping around for inducements to move out of its natural locus. Nor is it going to be won by tax-exemption or other unnatural favors—we had better be suspicious of the kind of business that can be fetched by those. Reputable and intelligent employers, furthermore, the only kind any community can wisely invite to come in, are not the kind to desert the workers who have helped to make them, and move to distant places where surplus numbers and

the power of reactionism prevent labor organization. The South can hardly expect that employers who seek such advantages will add much that is desirable to any Southern community. Rather than bring in sweat-shops and other forms of exploitation, with their attendant evils, it is far preferable to go on just as we are. The citizenship, the community, the quality of life, are much more important than factories; and it may be added that although we trail far behind in the statistics, we fortunately possess values, such as mutual regard, polite manners, the weight of an aristocratic tradition, and an outlook upon life, which never get into the statistics, yet it is these which are the principal distinction of the South. These are the qualities which cause Southerners to be so firmly attached to their part of the country and to remain so in spite of interminable statistics and of startling indictments at the hands of Messrs. Erskine Caldwell, William Faulkner, and their satellites. If we desire to preserve the distinctive Southern values, then we cannot be indiscriminate in what we do to industrialize the South. No factory should be sought without a previous consideration, in the most thorough-going, realistic terms, of the effects it will have on the things we value most. I recall that some years ago the city of Baltimore had an opportunity to bring in a fertilizer plant, and according to a newspaper there, the chamber of commerce was all for it, in spite of reports that the concern was about to be driven out of a New Jersey community for befouling the air until the residents could not stand it. Since Baltimore already had plenty of fertilizer smells, from factories of its own, the discriminating *Evening Sun* of that city sharply opposed the idea of bringing yet more, let it be hoped with ultimate success.

It sometimes appears that industrial management is less conscious of what is happening these days, even though this may be right before its eyes, than any other large element of the population. What is more natural in a changing economy and a free country than for the man who toils and has little of the world's goods, to try to better his condition? Even today there are obviously many people who think the worker is by nature destined to a servile position. These are the ones who think of the employer as master and the worker as slave, and the same who in the South fervently believe the Negro must be kept suppressed even when he has shown the capacity to rise. Such persons have the greatest

difficulty in understanding, if they ever do, that economic and social conditions are not and should not be fixed permanently and with a skewing in favor of their own class. Some that I have met actually believe there are socio-economic stratifications ordained by God. These unfortunate men and women, so unaccustomed to critical reflection upon our system, so little educated for realistic and efficient dealing with the forces of our time, are honestly unable to see justice or reason in the labor movement. One of them, the operator of a South Carolina textile mill, who incidentally was a graduate of one of our Southern colleges, told me during the N. R. A. period that things had come to such a pass that he was no longer able to think about them. Possibly I err, but it occurs to me that the college that graduated this man was not on the educational job—unless one is to suppose that education has nothing to do with the development of our powers of understanding and criticism.

Informed and fair-minded people now recognize that Southern labor has been exploited, whether by Southern or Northern employers, that it deserves a better deal, and that the means now exist or can be brought into existence by free intelligence and energetic action whereby that can be realized. Not many years ago it was thought radical to talk against making men work twelve hours a day in steel mills. I have been in a good many mills, factories, and shops, and in the homes of many workers, and I found nothing quite so impressive as the fact that their condition was nearly always an embarrassment to their employer. The latter, as a matter of fact, could not stand to look at his toilers, in the worst cases, in the presence of a visitor. He would painfully exhibit the expressions of shame and chagrin, and make haste to get out of their sight. But how could he fail to see that his own "earnings" and his position in local society bore the picture of those poor toilers? Was his mind closed to this fact as to so many others? The visitor could only picture him as a man who had lived in hiding, despite the fact of his affluence and power and of the invisibility of the walls behind which he secreted himself.

Sympathizers with the labor movement believe that by regulation of wasteful and unscrupulous competition and by enlightened cooperation between employer and employee, instead of selfish and destructive struggle, it is possible to raise the condition of the

worker, without loss to the employer, and probably with gain. The ablest labor leaders share this belief. Whether these interests are right or wrong is not the relevant question—if it were, ethics would be certain to decide for labor by saying it was not right for human beings to suffer the exploitation, on pain of starvation, that has existed and still does exist. It is idle and beside the point for people to cry out that the labor movement is poisoned with radicalism. What is more natural in such a movement than that zealots should appear? Have not the employers their Girdlers and Weirs?

It would be poor business, and worse public policy, for the South to go about industrialization without paying attention to facts and circumstances such as these. In the past, especially in quite recent years, Southern thought and scholarship have given attention to some aspects of our situation and outlook, and may have reached results of importance. But the effect of these is entirely too slight, where there has been any effect at all. Legislators and public officials are not in the habit of consulting them, in sharp contrast to their predecessors a hundred years ago when the South had an economy with a clearly understood theoretic basis. Our procedure and ideology today, with respect to industrialization, follow the chamber of commerce pattern rather than an objective, scientific one. We seem to be saying that salesmanship, enthusiasm, the booster's methods, and such, are preferable agencies and guides.

A more apt and dependable procedure, profitable to the South and to investors and manufacturers of other regions, would be one that carefully and objectively assessed our resources, pointing out what lines we were exceptionally endowed in and what particular industries could be expected to flourish. North Carolina undertook something of the kind some years ago. The New England Council has, I believe, done the same with successful results. A great mistake is made in many states when industrial and development commissions are put under the direction of advertising agents, journalists, or others not accustomed to the methods employed by the scientist or engineer.

But we might have on paper a fool-proof, entirely accurate prospectus of the opportunities for profitable enterprise, yet if the energy and initiative and thinking necessary to convert the

potentialities into reality were not present and working, nothing would result. There is no substitute for these. Cheap labor and tax exemptions and free factory sites certainly are not substitutes. They are a means of putting us unwittingly at the economic mercy of other people, when what we so greatly need is to mobilize and apply our own capacities for self-development. If the present policy of remitting taxes and suppressing unions should continue long, and if it caused Northern industry to settle here on any great scale, we would have simply thrown away our chance of creating our own industry and would have indentured ourselves to absentee owners in perpetuity. That is substantially what happened in the case of the great iron and steel opportunity at Birmingham, thirty years ago. It happened very widely in the textile industry, in coal, in electric power and the railroads, and I believe it is happening now in our new paper industry. One who travels in the great coal areas of West Virginia receives a signal impression. He does not see towns and villages, but *camps*—mining camps. That is what they are called. The inhabitants labor for outsiders, and West Virginia, a prodigiously wealthy state in respect of natural resources, is nevertheless one of the poorest otherwise.

If Southern interests are not alert and active, the experience of West Virginia may be repeated all over the region. We speak of developing our resources, but the phrase deceives. Exploiting and exhausting these resources, and ourselves in the bargain, is what we are more likely to do under the present planless course. Already we have gone so far in giving our resources away and in standing, or rather sitting, unsuspectingly by while they were being appropriated by others, that we have a practically impossible task if we should set out to reclaim them. If something is not done to check present tendencies, the rest will go and we shall all be tenants then.

It is not necessary for that to happen. The intelligence and energy necessary to prevent it are not wanting in the South, although they certainly are not functioning in that direction at present. These need to express themselves in each state in a crystallized program, to be drafted by the ablest minds, and to be backed, pushed, and put over by energetic and trusted leaders. A program of that kind would need to be continuous, founded upon the realities of the situation and motivated by the enlightened self

interest of the entire region, rather than one depending on political or other zeal likely to die out after a few spectacular flourishes. If some of our more enterprising public officials who have been courting Northern industry would concentrate their attention and talents on such a program here at home, in fact if only one of them would do so and thus set the example, the present tendency might be changed, to the profit of the entire South.

Sound industry is the natural fruit of its locality's resources—material, geographic, and human. The community or state seeking that kind of industry will consult these resources and bring them into action to produce its own manufactures and business. Is the South utilizing its endowment in that way? Certainly not. In the present solicitation program, as in those of the past, we have been depending almost altogether on labor. Have we not other human resources besides labor, resources such as economic and business enterprise, social intelligence, science, and the desire for the material advancement of the South? If so, why are they not organized to do their part? Would it not be much more astute for our state governments to quicken the functioning of these elements than it can possibly be to send out industrial procurers to the North?

The theory of the present policy is very simple. It is that we have a great reservoir of labor for which there are not enough jobs; that since the condition of many is deplorable, any employment is welcome; that if they can be set to earning, the money will circulate in all directions and so benefit us all. This is not a false idea but it is just the most elemental that could be conceived for meeting a problem of the magnitude of that confronting the South. It is the minimum mental and social endeavor toward solving the problem. We have intellectual and social resources that can go far beyond that. The trouble is that they are not now directed into effective channels. The governors of several Southern states have recently joined hands and undertaken to persuade the Interstate Commerce Commission to terminate the unjust discrimination against us in commodity freight rates; if they could hold together now for a broader program, and especially if each of them would set out to mobilize the best intelligence and initiative in his own state, and put these to work, then we would be on our way out of our troubles.

We are not using our material resources to meet even our own requirements. More than pig iron, spikes, and rails ought to come from the iron deposits we have. We buy great quantities of machinery and metal goods of all kinds which we ought to make ourselves. We don't clothe or feed ourselves by any means, though we produce nearly all the cotton and can produce almost any food. We don't can our food, but buy it canned a thousand or two thousand miles away. Louisiana produces delicious cane syrup which is unobtainable elsewhere and which surpasses most maple, yet other Southern states buy imitations of it concocted in the North. We have coal, iron, petroleum, phosphate, salt, sulphur, bauxite, calcium, silicon, etc., but where are the chemical industries that ought to have arisen from so rich an earth? We use radios and mechanical refrigerators and shall use more cooling systems than any other part of the country, and we have the materials for manufacturing them all, but we do not. We buy heavily of farm implements, tools of all kinds, appliances, office and household furnishings, and all the other material goods of modern American life, but outside of some furniture our purchases are chiefly made elsewhere. We send immense sums of insurance money to the North when nearly all of it ought to remain here. And when we have done all this, and furthermore have made our purchases in a tariff-protected market while selling our principal products for what we could get, what does the North do? She argues to the Interstate Commerce Commission, as recently as the summer of 1938, that discriminatory freights rates should be continued so as to block the South's gestures at developing competing manufactures! And then she either criticizes us for being backward or else wonders, incredulously, how Jeeter Lesters and the characters of "You Have Seen Their Faces" are possible. Well, we are pretty badly off in the South in many ways, but it is clear that we haven't got a corner on stupidity. I will add that the evidence points to a lynching somewhere, a slow and long protracted economic lynching—and the South isn't the guilty one this time.

The right kind of planning and campaigning can in all likelihood create a Southern market for Southern goods. If awakened to its position and opportunities, and if offered Southern goods equal to those from the North, the South will no doubt respond heartily. Our products have been at a disadvantage in some

Northern states for a long time, through discriminatory tax levies, a matter fit to make a first-rate sales appeal for our customers, as well as something for the genius of our legislators to consider at length. A made-in-the-South campaign could be carried to great success. In fact, if it is true that we have such great manufacturing advantages over other parts of the country as we have been advertising, then competition from those parts with our own goods in our own markets ought to be practically out of the question.

The agencies which are the natural and appropriate ones for informing and enlightening the South on its true condition and possibilities are the colleges and universities. They can show the new pathways and trust the livelier youths and citizens to take them. Have they done that? In small, unnoticed ways they may have, but other than that the answer must be, for the great body of them, in the negative. It is true that in one or two university centers very creditable work has been done toward such ends, but elsewhere the effect of the study of Southern affairs has been about the same as that of studying ancient history. So far as generating enlightened and efficacious action for the advancement of the South is concerned, most of our instruction might as well have been devoted to Chinese folklore or Shakespeare's use of the subjunctive.

Perhaps the reader, who may be a loyal alumnus, is saying, What would you have? The answer is not hard to find. Those who realize the potentialities of good education and who are informed about Southern needs in that particular will agree that a searching inquiry into our practices and standards, by first-rate educators from here and elsewhere, followed by judicious publication of the findings, would be a salutary first step. The same persons know that such an inquiry would show, among other things: interference from religious, political, and business sources; lack of support, and perhaps of appreciation, for the unfettered and vigorous teaching and the thorough research which alone could have generated the results we need; lack of courage in the conduct of institutions (with honorable exceptions); the consequent disposition of our best academic men to depart for greener pastures at the first opportunity (something which, unfortunately, is taken as a matter of course in academic circles); a resultant diminution of the whole caliber of our work to such a level that Professor

E. W. Knight of the University of North Carolina, the foremost authority on Southern education, could state a few years ago that the typical Southern college graduate was no better educated than the graduate of a first-class Northern high school, a statement based on statistical and other objective measures, but for which Professor Knight was roundly denounced in the Southern press—which is as if the best Southern pathologist were to be denounced (as I think once happened) for saying hookworm existed among us and needed certain measures for its elimination. We can truthfully say we haven't the money to pay for great libraries and laboratories and research programs to equal those of other sections, but what can we say for policies of repression which could only be expected to put the quietus on that kind of educational endeavor we so greatly need? Let me add that I have no reference to what I understand to be popularly meant by the term, communism, as so many imagine whenever criticism of traditional education or the social order is voiced these days. I refer only to a clear understanding of our position and what we can do about it within the framework of the existing order, but I realize that the indispensable requirements for that kind of education are freedom of thought and investigation, and forcefulness of teaching.

We fortunately possess at least one university which offers an example of effective higher education, and, further to our credit, or rather to the credit of North Carolina, it is a state university. The University of North Carolina has always had a high regard for science and work. Some of our other universities may easily surpass it in elegance of external appearance, in lavish fraternity houses, and in campus dress. But in intellectual labor, and results, it has had no match in the South for a generation, and not many in the whole country. That is its distinction, as is proper to a university. If it had to depend on expensive equipment and large funds, rather than intellectual endeavor, it would be unknown, for the state has done very poorly by it financially. Though great sums could be found for road building, including some that was little needed, not much could be found for mind building at the university level. Consequently the admirable institution at Chapel Hill has uniformly received only such amounts as go to obscure colleges in other parts of the country. It is easily seen that the

utmost educational effect has been drawn from these stingy allowances.

This was possible because of the existence and encouragement, at Chapel Hill, of ideas, energy, and initiative. The people of North Carolina are consequently beneficiaries on a scale far out of proportion to what they have paid for. The state has got the habit of critical examination and reflection wherever public policy of any kind is concerned. This is the very opposite of ecclesiastical or political or business dictatorship, though it is nothing more than ought to be found in any enlightened democracy. In spite of a still very inadequate grade-school system in large parts of the state, and of the heavy hand of Calvinism which lies on one or two important communities, and in spite also of powerful reactionary interests, enlightenment has spread and has got itself ingrained in public thought and action. Of course the University did not produce this happy condition by itself. There is an alert and intelligent press (omitting one or two shocking exceptions in the Charlotte-Gastonia area), which serves the interests of understanding and makes difficult the way of reactionism, oppression, and chicanery. There are clergymen here and there who had a part, individual educators in a number of colleges who did invaluable service, and a number of philanthropists to the cause. But it was the University that supplied the main stimulus by opening the minds of thousands of students, of future teachers, and of the citizenry at large, to the economic, social, political, and educational realities of that state, and to the prospective ways of meeting them intelligently. To do this required not only learning and labor but also stamina; it took courage to hold out against powerful industrial interests who wanted obscurantism instead of light and who more than once banded together to curb the University and even, to their shame, to have its president, one of the country's foremost, removed from office, not to speak of attempting to have some of the professors hamstrung; it took patience to stick to the task through lean years when it looked as though the Legislature would just as soon there had been no University; and it also took personal devotion, such as is met less and less in academic life today, to the institution and its aims. If the state of North Carolina had a full appreciation of these accomplishments, and an inclination to do the handsome thing by their authors, it would

provide a life pension for all concerned and would erect noble monuments to them. No state has received so much in return for so little.

Unfortunately, while other Southern universities and colleges admire the University of North Carolina, and are acquainted with the means by which it has attained so much, very few of them appear to follow its examples. If they did, Southern progress would be much farther along. If, instead of choosing soft conformists to head them and teach in them, as many have done, these houses of learning would seek men of force and penetration, the only kind of men who are competent to perform the hard job of advancing human understanding, then might it soon result that our college product could no longer be classed with the high-school product of the North. If I am sick, I want a physician who knows his business and is not afraid to perform it, I do not want a fellow who takes orders from me; the same if I want any other professional functionary. But in education it seems this principle is little observed in the South. The surest way to have a second-rate college is to put second-rate men in it. That is also the best way of making sure the college will do the bidding of outside masters, will shirk the difficult duties of honest education, and will contribute nothing to the life of its state. That kind of college presents just one question, namely, Why have it?

But the South's problems and opportunities can no longer wait for academic education to work them out—the colleges have had their chance and they muffed it. It is also idle to think that a general committee, meeting once or twice a year and publishing now and then a cold little pamphlet to be read by the members and then embalmed in libraries, can do the work. Something more than a survey and a report (which already exist without number) is wanted now. It is time for concrete business participation. Governors, bankers, industrialists, economists, and enlightened thinkers outside of these ranks are the men and women most fitted for the task. The group of governors who carried the freight-rate case to the Interstate Commerce Commission can initiate action that would command the most attention and yield the quickest results. The universities can supply materials and information of great value. It is a prime opportunity.

*by G. A. Cardwell*

## SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

### I

Your ears were tipped with bells of Honan jade,  
Subaqueously verte and deftly made;  
Your eyes were coolly gray and hard with scorn  
Of Jesus and all crucifixion:  
Your panther love was piercing as an arrow,  
Feathered for curving flight, yet swiftly narrow.  
"My dear, you are," you said, "inhibited,  
Strangled, as one too often gibbeted  
By pride and shame and introspection."  
I answered only after some reflection.  
"No need," you said, "for analytical  
Misease. Our friends will madden you with critical  
Impressions gratis. Do you see?"  
Ah, Laura, dark mother of the present me—  
Sea-blossom cold, oracularly wise—  
I read a barren rede deep in your eyes.

### II

When pretty ladies come to tea  
Carve their shrouds of ivory.  
Cull the flowers from classic walls;  
Chisel shark-gods on their palls;  
Tint with blood their dainty dresses;  
To the moon-birds fit their jesses.  
Pluck the brows above their eyes  
With falcate wires to hear their cries:  
When they lose their gentle wits,  
When they're frightened into fits,  
Stuff their throats with cramoisie  
And calm each female jessamy.

## III

Deep in the slaty coverts of my heart  
A tiny image shatters at your voice.  
Your placid favor, your relentless art,  
Your metal breasts like torrent's spate are dear  
Inherently; and yet the treasured break  
Of summer memory is fresh alone  
When timbre stabs the past, and, flake by flake,  
Deliciously eats through the sculptured stone.  
Cunning of mole and cold batrachian zest  
Lend monstrous purport to your every tone . . .  
Illogical refining of a grief  
By long years' grasses hid and overgrown !  
Still conjuring dead passion with the sly  
North-north-west wisdom of a tedious fool,  
I fly at webs, put present errands by,  
And linger at a parched, sun-drawn pool.

*by Roscoe Pound*

## THE RECRUDESCENCE OF ABSOLUTISM

LET us recall the political and legal situation at the beginning of the present century. The breakdown of the relationally organized society of the Middle Ages had led to a strengthening of the English crown at the expense of the checks upon royal authority which went along with the feudal polity. The Reformation had weakened the co-ordinate authority of the Church. The process of unification at the expense of the great vassals of the crown in France had led to a strong central government which men looked to all over Europe as a model. But in England, as a result of the contest between the courts and Parliament on the one hand and the Tudor and Stuart kings on the other, the rising tide of absolutism was stayed. The judiciary became independent. It became settled that the king could not decide causes in person and that the administration of justice was for the courts. Equity crystallized and the justice of the courts became a justice according to law. The royal power of dispensing with the law in particular cases for special reasons was abolished. The supremacy of the law became definitely established as a fundamental tenet of the English polity. The Puritan doctrine of a willing covenant of conscious faith came to be thought of as the source of political authority.

As the great preacher of the Puritans put it, we were to be with one another, not over one another. These ideas were the ideas which came to the new world with the colonists. These ideas were carried out in the constitutions drawn up during and after the Revolution and, as they took form in the Constitution of the United States, were declared and developed in the State Constitutions of the nineteenth century. There was to be a distribution of the powers of government and each distributee was to be kept to its allotted sphere by law. There was to be a government of laws and not of men. One will was not to be subjected to the arbitrary will of another. No one was to be excluded from the common interest arbitrarily.

In England, the ultimate result of the Revolution of 1688 was to set up a parliamentary absolutism where the Stuarts had failed to establish a royal absolutism. But in practice this theoretical parliamentary absolutism was held in check by a long tradition of repugnance to arbitrary power. We, on the other hand, inherited and carried out the medieval idea of a fundamental Law and set up constitutions, declared to be the supreme law of the land, in which individual rights were guaranteed by that supreme law against action by the agencies of politically organized society.

In the meantime in Continental Europe executive absolutism had had a steady development since the end of the Middle Ages. Centralized governments, to the pattern of the French monarchy of the old régime, grew up all over Europe, and the French Revolution turned them into something very like administrative absolutisms. But the English example had an increasingly strong influence after the Napoleonic Wars. In Central Europe after 1848 constitutional limited monarchy became the rule and after the World War English parliamentary institutions were adopted everywhere.

From the Puritan Revolution to the World War, the watchword was "Liberty". Constitutions were made to be guarantees of liberties, not merely frames of government. The idea of giving to each free man the maximum of free scope for spontaneous initiative and acquisitive self-assertion reached its highest development in the United States in the last half of the nineteenth century. But in the fore part of that last half century a new idea arose to compete with the idea of liberty. Hegel thought of history as a record of the progressive unfolding or realizing of the idea of freedom. Spencer conceived of a progress toward free individual self-assertion as the rational outcome of the universe. A newer idea begins with Karl Marx. To be more precise, it begins with Marx's interpretation of history.

Marx thought of history as the record of a progressive unfolding or realizing of an economic idea—of an idea of the maximum satisfaction of material wants. This interpretation was hardly noticed until about 1885. It came into vogue on the Continent about 1890. It spread to the United States in the first decade of the present century. The idea behind it, the idea of satisfying material wants as the end and aim of society, rather than one of

satisfying a spiritual want to be free, has gradually had a profound effect upon political and legal thought and so upon political and legal institutions throughout the world.

Liberty as a political and legal idea presupposes a balance. It presupposes a balance between the general security which makes possible the liberty of all and the individual life, which is what is to be free and is realized in the liberty of each. Concretely, this involves a balance between society and the individual, between the local government and the neighborhood, between the central and the local government, between administration and the judiciary. Balance is by no means an obsolete idea of the eighteenth century. It is only by achieving and maintaining those balances that a single political organization can rule a whole continent otherwise than as an autocracy. Great areas have never been ruled otherwise than by an autocracy or by a federal government built on the idea of balance. But balance in political organization of society presupposes law. It is a balance maintained by law.

Balance and law are anathema to the materialist polity. The end being satisfaction of material wants, the question is simply one of the most efficient means of assuring that end. Liberty and balance and law are not compatible with the highest order of material efficiency. We have had such a long experience of liberty maintained by law in a balanced government that we have come to take the result for granted without recognizing what it presupposes. But that it cannot be ignored, and is in reality not ignored by those who have been most prone to disbelieve in it, is illustrated in the struggle in industry between a quest of the highest degree of productive efficiency and the quest of the workers for freedom, often at the expense of material considerations. In a materialist polity there is no place for law. Marx urged that law was a product of class domination and that with the elimination of private property and consequent disappearance of classes, law too would disappear. This was taken seriously in Soviet Russia until the present régime there found it necessary to go on a new tack. Law was to be replaced by administration. As the juristic and economic adviser of the Russian Government put it, in the ideal society there is no law, or rather but one rule of law: namely, that there are no laws but only administrative ordinances and orders.

It must be admitted that Marxian ideas have been affecting current thought beneath the surface much more than is always realized. This idea of the disappearance of law, in particular, has been growing in many quarters. Along with it has gone a rise of political absolutism in Continental Europe, setting a growing fashion of administrative absolutism everywhere.

Let us note the modes of thought which are behind this recrudescence of absolutism. The first outgrowth of Marx's economic interpretation was economic realism. All action, all human behavior proceeded wholly on economic motives. Judges decided, law makers made laws, jurists worked out theories of rights and moralists worked out theories of justice or of right and wrong solely as expressions of the self-interest of a dominant social and economic class. Law was nothing but a formulation of class self-interest. Political institutions had no other basis of obligation than their end and purpose of holding down one class in the interest of another. Next came a combination of Marx and Freud in the form of psychological realism. As a matter of psychology it was impossible for a human judge to decide objectively. He could only do what his temperament and prejudices and predispositions, determined by his bringing up and social surroundings, dictated. This was quickly followed by a combination of Marx and Einstein. Yellowplush said of spelling that every gentleman was entitled to his own. The skeptical relativist says that in political and legal thought everyone is entitled to whatever starting point he chooses. Laws are only threats, and the making and enforcing of these threats are relative to the personalities of those who wield the power of a politically organized society for the time being. There are no rights. It is not that men have rights and the state makes threats to give effect to them. The ruling class has interests, and the threats made to secure them give rise to claims miscalled "rights". We can begin our political theory where we choose. Accordingly, the great relativist of today says that democracy is necessarily an absolute democracy. A democracy such as our own, which has covenanted not to do certain things and to guarantee certain liberties is, in his system, a contradiction in terms. Majorities and pluralities are not merely convenient instruments for arriving at political decisions. If we start from an idea of democracy there must be a majority absolutism. To the dogmatic relativist it is

no answer to point out that in America we have maintained a constitutional democracy which has subjected itself to self-imposed limitations and that it has carried on for a century and a half. In his sense it is not a democracy.

Beyond all this, Marx and Freud and Einstein are carried to the nth power in skeptical realism, which holds that every thing except what officials do in each case is illusion. As it is put, law is whatever is done officially. It is illusion to talk as if some things are done officially according to law, some without law, and some against law. What officials do is law because they do it.

Two recent types of philosophy, replacing the idealism of the nineteenth century, are reenforcing these forms of political and legal thought. One is phenomenism. The other is a curious variant of phenomenism, or phenomenism on the basis of Thomas Aquinas, which is called neo-scholastic institutionalism.

Phenomenalism holds that there is nothing behind or beyond phenomena. They are all that we have to do with. There is nothing behind them but their own phenomenality. They are all equally significant and equally insignificant. As one might put it, all phenomena were created free and equal. Hence every item of political action is valid in and of itself as a phenomenon. Law is a futility because it seeks to systematize the items of governmental action, which are valid and self-sufficient without regard to any system. Whatever those who wield the power of politically organized society choose to do is its own justification. What the prince wills, said Justinian's *Institutes*, in the days of the Byzantine-Roman autocracy, has the force of a statute. Today the phenomenalist advocate of absolutism would put it: whatever the official does is itself law. It is a self-sufficient phenomenon.

Neo-scholastic institutionalism reaches some of the same results in another way. Medieval scholasticism was a logical development of authoritatively-given premises—the Bible as interpreted by the Church and the writing of the Fathers of the Church, Aristotle, and the Roman law as found in the *Corpus Juris*. But Thomas Aquinas held that there was *discovered* truth as well as *revealed* truth. And the neo-scholastic institutionalism has discovered an authoritative starting point in the institution. God made the State and that is all there is to it. The State is its own justification. This approaches phenomenism which would say that any given

political organization is a phenomenon and needs no further basis of authority. Neo-scholastic institutionalism would say, the polity of a given society is an institution and that is enough. This looks at first like putting on God the blame for things which the institution does. But no! There is no scientific question of blame. Praise and blame are individual value judgments and value judgments are only valid in the particular system of thought of a particular individual. A scientific attitude casts out all such value judgments and looks only at what happens. Scientifically there is no such thing as "ought to happen". "Ought" is a word that belongs to individual systems of thought and has no absolute validity.

Recently a book has been written on Ethics from the phenomenalist standpoint. It makes those of us who were raised in the days of horse and buggy ethics rub our eyes. The burden of the book is that the nineteenth century ethics was "legalistic". It thought in terms of moral laws. There are no such things. We must divorce ethics completely from any idea of laws or rules. We have to do only with items of behavior. Conduct is made up of behavior phenomena and these are to be studied simply as phenomena.

Such modes of thought are obviously adapted to autocracies and dictatorships. If autocracies and dictatorships can secure satisfaction of the material wants of a majority, they meet the requirements of relativist realism; and in their institutional capacity they justify themselves. Moreover, the items of their action are behavior phenomena not to be tried by rules or laws of morals.

Autocrats and dictators cannot attend personally to all the details of government. Their rule must be carried on of necessity through bureaus and boards and administrative agencies. Hence the idea of balance is superseded by the idea of administrative absolutism, and that idea is backed up by skeptical realism, by phenomenism, and by neo-scholastic institutionalism. Skeptical realism tells the administrative bureau that, as a matter of psychology, no one can reach an objective determination. Skeptical relativism adds that value judgments are purely subjective, so the bureau official may legitimately put his own value on his own individual hunch. What he does will be determined by his individual temperament and prejudices and surroundings. So there is no use trying to guide administrative action by such illusory things as rules or principles.

of law or moral judgments or anything but the will of his administrative superiors. Phenomenalism tells him that what a bureau or commission or administrative official does in any particular case is a phenomenon and must be treated as such. It stands independent of all other phenomena. Very likely he will understand institutionalism to tell him that each administrative bureau is an institution and as such justifies itself. What it does is for itself to judge of, and subjection of its action to judicial scrutiny is an impertinence standing in the way of efficiency. The effect of these modes of thought, which have become widespread in the teaching of politics and have been coming into law-teaching, is to be seen in an increasing vogue of administrative absolutism in the English-speaking world of today.

For the English-speaking world, continental writers on public law have provided most of the theory for the advocates of administrative absolutism—for uniting legislative, judicial, and administrative functions in one bureau, which may also combine accusatory, investigatory, and judicial powers with advocacy before itself, and all this without judicial or any other than administrative review. The reason why our teachers and writers have turned to these books is that as a rule they have not been lawyers and have not been trained in the Anglo-American legal tradition. When they looked at the English and American law books they could find nothing about public law as such. In Blackstone's *Commentaries* what today we should call public law is put under the private law relating to persons. So it is in the Report of the American Bar Association Committee on Classification of Law. Much of what we should now call administrative law must be looked for under Procedure. If one wished to find public law labeled and indexed as such, he had to go to the treatises of university teachers on the Continent. There he found ideas of public law which grew up on a Roman basis out of the writings of publicists in France under the old régime. Those ideas of administration differ radically from those which had always obtained in our law, and conflicts between the law of the courts and views of the teachers of politics, reflected in the views of bureau officials, were inevitable.

Magna Carta is the foundation of our public law, as the Roman law books, speaking from the absolute empire of the sixth century, are the foundation of the public law of continental Europe. Ab-

solutism is as repugnant to the one as it is congenial to the other. But Magna Carta was a statement of the reciprocal rights and duties of the king, as ultimate landlord, and his tenants-in-chief. The Middle Ages confused or did not distinguish ownership and sovereignty. Hence there was a natural transition when, after the king as ruler became more significant than the king as paramount landlord, the seventeenth century lawyers made of the Great Charter a statement of rights and duties in the relation of ruler and ruled. The legal limitations on the authority of those who acted in the king's name were prescribed in the ordinary precepts of the traditional law, enforced in ordinary legal proceedings in the ordinary courts. Thus these precepts seemed to be precepts as to a certain type of person and to belong in the law of persons.

It had been supposed that the supremacy of the law, the subjection of administrative action to judicial scrutiny to see that it accords with the law of the land and is not unreasonable and arbitrary, was settled at the Revolution of 1688 for England and by the constitutional guarantees of due process of law for America. But today a contest between courts and administrative bureaus is going on all over the English-speaking world. Two maxims, which as the lawyer sees it, are involved in the very idea of justice, are continually invoked by the courts. One is that no one is to be judge in his own case; the other is *audi alteram partem*— hear the other side. Seventeenth century English courts enforced the first even against acts of Parliament, holding that a statute making a person judge in his own case was against common right and reason so that a court would not give effect to it. When Parliament became supreme after 1688 and there ceased to be a fundamental law in England, nevertheless the courts could judge of the conformity of administrative acts to common right and reason unless forbidden by statute. They have steadfastly enforced the two propositions against the tendency of bureaus and administrative boards to ignore both of them in the interest of efficiency.

English, American, and Australian reports today are full of cases where an administrative bureau or commission or official has acted after hearing or conferring with one side without hearing the other. In a leading English case a bureau acted after calling one side into conference without notice to or presence of the other. In a recent American case, a commission acted adversely to

important interests without a hearing, although the statute required one. In a recent Australian case, the administrative official conducted an experiment on the basis of which he revoked a license, in the presence of one interested party and without notice to or knowledge of the other. Such things, indeed, are defended by many, and legislation is pressed to prevent correction of them by the courts. It is no less common for an administrative bureau to receive complaint, draw up a charge, investigate the charge, act as advocate on behalf of the charge before itself, and itself make an order in what it has made its own case. English and American law reports show many cases where administrative action has had to be set aside for this sort of thing.

Arbitrary action was especially in evidence in the enforcement of the National Prohibition Act, where efficiency was felt to justify ignoring of constitutional guarantees of individual rights. But for absolutism of any kind there are no individual rights. Indeed, for recent modes of thought there are no such things as rights anywhere. Also for administrative absolutism there is no such thing as law. There are only administrative orders made for each case treated as a unique case, independent of all others. If there is a law, it is only a threat of administrative action in a particular case. If there is Law, it is the sum of whatever is done officially.

I submit that the rise and vogue of such modes of thought in the English-speaking world are quite as significant as the rise and vogue of dictators elsewhere. Forms of government are not the whole story. An autocrat may be an emperor or a king or a leader of the people in a fascist state or, like the Roman emperor, the first citizen of a republic. A king may be an absolute monarch, or he may be a constitutional monarch, reigning but not ruling. If he reigns and others rule, they may rule absolutely, or they may rule according to law. A government in form and theory democratic may rule by bureaus and boards and administrative officials who act absolutely, whose every action is taken for law, or may rule by administrative agencies which act under and according to law. The essential point is whether in the quest of a material end efficiency is all that is regarded or in the quest of an idealist end there is a balance between efficiency and the individual life. If we believe that man is a rational creature, with an immortal soul, with a higher purpose on earth than filling his stomach, we can

still have faith in a balance that will reach and maintain an adjustment between free individual self-assertion and regimented co-operation; that will seek a development of each so far as is compatible with the other, conceiving of each as making for the maintaining and furthering of civilization.

From the beginning of politically organized society, this need of a balance between the general security and the individual life has given men trouble. We must entrust officials with power to wield the force of society. We must safeguard the individual against arbitrary and unreasonable exercise of that power. It is not easy for the public to see these two sides of government at the same time. Indeed, a recent philosopher of law is inclined to give the matter up as what he calls an irreducible contradiction between two things which both enter into the legal ordering of human relations. It takes a skilful juggler to keep more than one ball in the air continually at the same time. It takes a trained thinker to keep both of two antithetical ideas in mind at the same time. The easy course is to see but one of them at a time. Hence, in political and legal history there has been a constant swing back and forth between over-regard for the one and over-emphasis on the other. No doubt, in a ycase, it is a hard balance to work out and to preserve. Yet it had been worked out well in American institutions for the society of the nineteenth century. One may grant that we need to work it out again for the society of the twentieth century. But to reject all that we have learned from experience developed by reason, and reason measured and tested by experience, is simply institutional waste.

Moreover, if we look at French administrative law aright, it will be seen that so far from an administrative absolutism, the French have sought to check administrative action by setting up a real court for the purpose, as we have sought to check it by our traditional device of review in the ordinary courts.

What more than anything else conduces to the growth of administrative absolutism in the United States, is the archaic, expensive, technical, dilatory procedure involved in the protection of individual rights and enforcement of the constitutional guarantees of them. So long as it costs too much in money, time, and general bother to vindicate one's rights, one is likely to shrug his shoulders and let them go until it becomes too late to retrieve

them. The litigious Briton of whom Sir Frederick Pollock wrote, who "filed his bills and sued his writs and chuckled at a flaw", who "faced the attorney's bill of costs and damned a compromise", has become obsolete in a busy, hustling age of efficiency. In a time that values material wants above the spiritual, freedom must yield to getting things done.

If we are to check the revival of absolutism in this country, we must simplify the machinery of asserting and vindicating individual rights. If we do not, we may find that the phenomenlists have the better of it. There will be no rights.

*by Medford Evans*

### TO MY BELOVED ON THE THOUGHT OF DEATH

However it may be that we shall die—  
Whether at the line of death some active force  
Shall deal with us summarily, divorce  
Our bodies, brains, hands, lips, hair, and the cry  
Of voices in our throats from that strange *I*,  
As one divorces from the flame the coarse  
Wax body, but to find that the pure source  
Of light is gone, and the black wick is dry—

Or whether we shall die as one that ends  
A period of novitiate and goes  
Into his realm, his office, and there wears  
All honored some clear earnest of his years  
Of study—still, the one thing my heart knows:  
He sends us both, where'er or why He sends.

*by Thomas Scherrebeck*

## MEXICAN MURALS

### TASCO DE ALARCON

white walls under red tile  
hills and clean blue sky

stars and Vicente  
singing through the night  
love and a naked heart

blind paths wind upward steeply  
peace and the steady stars

laughter skipping over  
slippery cobblestones  
music  
and a quick-born dawn

voices swinging between "barrancas"  
staggering burros  
and the town wakes up

broad-beamed Americans  
"how much?  
too much!  
my Aunt Mathilde . . ."  
but they roar away

\* \* \* \* \*

timeless walls under red tile  
secret hills and the sky

## SEÑORITA EMILY POST

*from a niche  
in the cathedral wall  
a broken-winged Gabriel  
flies in the sun,  
and a bird preens  
on the flaming sword.*

“Hi you  
D’you speak ’merican?”

NUESTRA MADONA  
DE LA GUADALUPE,  
LA TURISTA!

“si, señora”

“Miss”

“i have  
much sorry  
meess”

“Say  
Wherinhell’s  
A decent  
Silvershop?”

“shop of  
señor sprattling  
good for  
silver”

(Dirty Mex. . .  
Wicked eyes. . .  
Probably a bandit...  
Wants to sleep with me...  
Syphilitic...  
Filthy swine. . .)

FULL STEAM AHEAD  
FOR  
CASA SPRATTLING

"señorita. . ."

DROP ANCHOR  
CHUG CHUG CHUG

"Well, whadyouwant?"  
(If he gets fresh. . .  
And with my fist too. . .)

"in school  
teacher taught us  
say  
'thank you'"

FULL STEAM AHEAD  
FOR  
CASA SPRATTLING  
MUCH SMOKE  
MUCH SPEED

*the bird is gone  
from the sword,  
and Gabriel cannot fly  
in the shade*

## BAPTISMAL REGISTER

which one  
this time?

the little book of  
children-with-fathers

or the big book of  
children-without-fathers

## LA ARTISTA

with box, stool and umbrella  
Guillermo trots obediently behind,  
ruminating  
the prospects of another mad morning  
while "la (antigua) señorita"  
CREATES

"Watercolor, yes, watercolor  
The only medium to catch the translucency  
of the sun, my dear  
Oil is SO messy, so DREADFULLY messy  
Mrs Rumble, back home in Iowa  
(President of our Art League  
Studied with Jorwinski  
Two whole years  
Imagine. . . )  
Mrs Rumble says that neither Van Gogh nor  
Cezanne have more *feel for the sun*  
than I  
I LOVE the sun, don't you?

But such Havoc with my skin. . . little red bumps  
That awful man, Mr David Herbert Lawrence  
wrote *something* about the sun  
Why MUST it rain?"

creativity  
puts Tasco on paper  
in ten days,  
bragging  
never spends more than an hour,  
bragging  
has captured  
ALL things beautiful  
in Tasco

Guillermo, silent  
before the endless chatter,  
wonders if every "artista" is  
"un poco loco en coco",  
knows the calendar in  
Paco's Bar much prettier

## SANTA PRISCA

tall and pink  
the church, dominant,  
lifts carved towers  
above plain walls:  
fragile towers  
like lace on the sleeves of  
a dancer's shirt

cupids, bishops, saints  
and twisted columns  
Santa Prisca and the clock  
forever wrong  
rise above the door of  
sturdy oak

a few women and stray old men  
come to pray in the cool light,  
birds flutter in through broken windows  
chirp and sleep on the patient saints

Thomas Cook & Sons  
drop dusty tourists  
who giggle under handkerchiefs  
who argue over shutter speeds  
and say that the high altar  
looks like a Mexican Laocoon:  
gilded guts strangling protesting kewpies

deepdown  
Tasco shudders and  
red roofs tighten their fingers  
desperately to the mountain

by L. Robert Lind

## THE CRISIS IN LITERATURE

### I—LITERATURE TODAY

*The situation, looked upon with intelligence and considered as a long-range proposition, can lead to but one of two personal conclusions: it can make one either a cynic or a revolutionist.*

JOHN CHAMBERLAIN: *FAREWELL TO REFORM*

CONTEMPORARY literature has entered upon a period of decline. No sensitive observer can avoid so dreary a conclusion. An age whose most significant long poem is Mr. T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", whose most characteristic novelists are Proust and Joyce, whose critical genius expresses itself in tones of unmitigated gloom and despair, cannot escape the stigma of that vague term "decadent" even while the literary horizon gleams with the fitful fires of a new proletarian art.

To say all this is to put the matter in words which, however extreme, cannot be categorically denied. In fact, a small army of reviewers and analysts of letters in Europe and America have, since the World War, piled up an insuperable mass of evidence in the affirmative; they have all come back empty-handed from the search for abiding vitality and fresh viewpoints in the literature of the last two decades.

It is sufficient here to instance only a few keen critics: Joseph Wood Krutch, Matthew Josephson, Edmund Wilson, Max East-

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I should like to express in this place my gratitude to the following publishers for permission to quote from books and articles published by them: Espasa Calpe, Madrid (for two brief translations from the Spanish of José Ortega y Gasset); Oxford University Press; Basil Blackwell; Faber and Gwyer; Liveright and Co.; Random House; International Publishers, Inc.; Henry Holt and Co.; The American Review; Harcourt, Brace and Co.; New Republic, Inc.; University of North Carolina Press; Harvard University Press; Books Abroad; Houghton Mifflin Co.; The Viking Press; D. C. Heath; Lothrop, Lee, Shepard and Co.; The Hogarth Press.

man, John Strachey, and Granville Hicks.<sup>1</sup> Their concern has been with the evidences of decay in contemporary letters, the impossibility of creating great works of literature in the present social system, with the various subterfuges that writers have sought in the attempt to avoid a general paralysis of the creative forces, or with the hopes that Marxian-revolutionary principles offer to the literary craftsman. The conclusions arrived at in the considerable body of their critical work, produced within the last seven years, cannot be judged lightly; and when we add to their number a surprisingly large group of far more conservative and optimistic critics, as well as the myriad bored reviewers to whose tender mercies the literature of our day has been entrusted, the harsh words of the most extreme pessimists among them reveal something very close to the truth.

It may be well, before setting down any further sweeping generalities of this nature, to describe in as much detail as necessary the actual character of humane letters at present. Even admitting the possibility that the giants of the past loom larger than life in a period which lacks all but the memory of their achievements, it is obvious at once that literature in our time has not produced its proper share of figures of the first rank, whereas those we glibly call "great contemporaries" seem in danger of losing, through causes which will be described, even that measure of greatness we have bestowed on them. It will not be sufficient to bring forward the stock contention that any age, through lack of the proper perspective, is incapable of estimating its men of letters at their true value. There is much room for doubt whether there has ever existed any group of writers, from Shakespeare on down, who have not been fairly and equitably ranked by their contemporaries,

<sup>1</sup>THE MODERN TEMPER: A Study and a Confession; Joseph Wood Krutch. Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1929.

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS AMERICAN: Matthew Josephson. Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1930.

AXEL'S CASTLE: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930; Edmund Wilson. Scribner's, New York, 1931.

THE LITERARY MIND: Its Place in an Age of Science; Max Eastman. Scribner's New York, 1931.

THE COMING STRUGGLE FOR POWER, John Strachey, Chaps. X and XI; The Modern Library. New York, 1935.

THE GREAT TRADITION: An Interpretation of American Literature; revised edition, Granville Hicks. Macmillan, New York, 1935.

with all due allowance for the incomprehensible vagaries of criticism. It is, at least, a point of question as to whether the neglected genius who is discovered by some succeeding generation is not, in spite of his real merit, the helpless victim of a passing cult or fancy, as Donne and Hopkins are today. Indeed, the practice of "reviving" certain figures of the past, while certainly a harmless and possibly a most instructive one, bears, nevertheless, a close resemblance to those innumerable parlor games, from bridge to anagrams, which in America enliven the tedium of waiting for genius to appear.

So bleak a prospect as that which will be opened in the following pages can receive its absence of cheer, however, from nothing so melancholy as neglected genius, blind and impotent criticism, or the besetting triviality in taste of the reading public. With all the consistency compatible with an analysis which cannot wholly dispense with historical considerations, the problem is one which requires the treatment exclusively of literature as it is today, the causes for its progressive inanition, and the means it will be most likely to take in attaining once more a position of importance in the world of art.

Literature, as it has been written in the last thirty years, has exhibited, in spite of an environment which has changed with lightning speed in every conceivable way and in a time when the desire to read has grown as fast as illiteracy has receded, no new and deep currents of thought, whereas it has broken completely with most of the main streams of nineteenth century thinking. It is my purpose in part of the following argument to explain this situation as well as possible.

Criticism may be denied the adjective "creative" on the grounds that it is in essence an analytical reconstruction, in accordance with standards more or less objective, of the piece of literature which gives rise to it. It is, of course, an incomplete discipline, hopeless of ever entering fully into the circumstances which produce any given work of literature, at its best rudimentary insofar as understanding the psychology of composition is concerned, and so subject to individual idiosyncrasies of taste and temperament as to be almost useless as anything more than a rough guide to the directions in which literature is moving in any period. But, granting even the not unreasonable objection that the bulk of criticism may itself be entirely wrong in its interpretation of current literature,

that its view as well as mine is far too dark to be thoroughly trustworthy, one has only to survey the art of letters today in order to arrive at conclusions not far from those which I shall proceed to draw.

## I

Who, then, are the important writers of the twentieth century? It is at once apparent that any choice must be arbitrary; but it should be possible to choose figures whose inclusion in the latter-day canon will not arouse too violent a dissent. It is, once more, an obvious difficulty to make such a choice even from the handful of those who, in the English-speaking world at least, have attained not merely the spurious fame of newspaper publicity but a large measure of genuine acceptance based on the integrity of their actual achievements. However, with all the blithe dogmatism of an Alexandrian critic drawing up a list of the ten great Greek orators, I may not be far wrong in suggesting James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, John Galsworthy, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Oswald Spengler, and, lest American readers be disappointed, Sinclair Lewis, William Faulkner, Archibald MacLeish, Robinson Jeffers, and Ernest Hemingway. This is a list which I do not claim to be completely exclusive or in any way free from private predilection or purpose; observe, also, that it includes several Continental writers who have won as much fame abroad in the magical form of English translation as in the lands of their own tongues. I have selected them as they occurred to me; I might have done almost as well by resorting to a *sortes Vergilianae* with the aid of an up-to-date biographical dictionary.

The reader will at once ask what fantastic literary algebra can be derived from a formula which seems to contain such presumably incompatible elements, or how the world-views of Spengler and Galsworthy can be resolved into any logically tenable unity. To play Procrustean games with criticism is not my purpose here. What has prompted me in my choice, nevertheless, is precisely the point of view which, with some variations, these writers appear to hold in common.

To analyze their work separately is out of the question here; their views and methods are so familiar to the reading public that such analysis is unnecessary. But, to draw together the

threads which bind their temperaments and outlooks, it is plain that each is absorbed with the same ideas and expresses them in his own style: they are occupied in their writings with moral confusion, degeneration in character, the blank oppression of a material world grown alien to them, a bewilderment with its sinister complexities and a desire to escape from them, an almost pathological dwelling upon the spiritual distortions produced by it, and with a calm, whimsical, or stern, a casual, morbid, or outrageously cruel representation of the worst that modern life presents to their view.

So much, both true and false, has been written of Joyce, Proust, Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence that it is almost tiresome to attempt to say more about them. John Strachey has, in two brief chapters, given a clear rationale and guide to the implications inherent in the works of Proust, Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, and Huxley: theirs is essentially a literature of escape, renunciation, bitter and passionate protest, or, in the case of Eliot, a bland and aristocratic withdrawal toward the ideals of the seventeenth century in literature, the Anglican Church in religion, and royalism in politics. Huxley has at last offered, in his latest novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*, a singularly unsatisfactory solution for the intellectual and moral chaos he, in company with these other writers, has experienced in the modern world, a sort of empty re-affirmation of the goodness of human nature even in a society which tends increasingly to prove that this goodness has long disappeared, together with the last shred of faith in Leagues of Nations, international peace, and the healing force of the Christian religion. Lawrence, poor tremendous soul, found a no more convincing solution in his curious mysticism of the flesh, as he has recorded in terrible outcries against the world which, in his *Letters*, as in his novels, grew wilder and more hysterical from the World War onward until his death.

Joyce and Proust, already figures of the past, although Joyce is still alive, produced their astonishing books without any prevision of the fate which, as Edmund Wilson points out in the final pages of *Axel's Castle*, was to befall them: survival only as influences of a rare and, as it seems, not entirely fruitful character, as the latest representatives of a Symbolism which ran dry in Dada or Surrealism, in stream of consciousness fiction and in the efforts of a horde of imitators.

Much brilliance and genius in these writers have come to an end

in what we cannot reasonably call new hope for letters or in any way more than a substantial, if perplexing, contribution to literary forms and methods. A new *Ulysses* seems not only impossible but unnecessary; a second *À la Recherche* would be definitely a work of supererogation. They stand as lonely landmarks in a desolate landscape; and their very difficulty and uniqueness render them incapable of exercising an abiding influence upon literature in general. We look back to them now with melancholy, much as the late Byzantines must have looked back upon the Alexandra of Lycophron which, for all its surface brilliance and intentional obscurity, remained, likewise, *sui generis* and without issue.

Two of these writers may seem to have escaped the general sense of defeat and emptiness which pervades the work of the others: John Galsworthy and Thomas Mann. It is not merely a superficial similarity which links them together in the minds of critics, so that Thomas Mann has been called "the Galsworthy of Germany". Their social background as members of the middle class, their connection with the literature of the nineteenth century, a certain urbane sanity and conventionality about their work makes easy a conjoint discussion. Both have had an unusually fortunate and happy career, have won international fame and the Nobel prize, and have been, in their mild way, associated with progressive, liberal, and idealistic movements now dead in Europe. Both have written the social history in fiction of their class; both have held faith in the essential nobility of the bourgeoisie, but a faith which has tended to waver into protest.

Galsworthy, essentially a Victorian, has described in his novels the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in the history of a large and increasing family—the Forsytes. To him, old Jolyon Forsyte, the type of the bluff British merchant who drove a hard bargain but would not stoop to cheat, is a wholly admirable figure, as he is to most readers; but Soames Forsyte, his descendant, is made quite repulsive for a great part of his career not only for artistic effect and contrast but because the later years have actually produced exactly his sort of cowardly business man. Most of the characters who move through Galsworthy's more recent novels make one feel that Galsworthy is a bit dismayed and shocked, though trying to understand them, by their counterparts in real life, and altogether ill at ease in a world so far away from

the mellow, hearty, somehow satisfying and comfortable society of the eighteen-eighties and nineties. The giddy and purposeless creatures who populate the pages of *A Modern Comedy* appear in striking and pitiless contrast to the stronger figures of the earlier novels, who themselves are not, of course, entirely free from the symptoms of deterioration we deplore in the later characters. We are already, with this phase of Galsworthy's writing, among *Point Counter Point* people, or, at least, within the literary landscape of Evelyn Waugh. Almost against his will, Galsworthy has recorded the decay, through three generations of a characteristic middle class British family, of much that was admirable in the tradition of English society; and the end is disquiet, defeat, and death.

Thomas Mann began his calm criticism of society quite early, with his first novel, *Buddenbrooks*. Here, too, we see the decline through three generations of a German business family, closely associated with the history of the nineteenth century. Apart from its effectiveness as a work of art, *Buddenbrooks* is significant as a social document whose net effect is sinister and appalling, foreshadowing its author's life-long preoccupation with moral decay and impotence. This preoccupation is revealed in the studies of perversion and incest to be found in *Death in Venice* and *The Blood of the Walsungs* as well as in the speculative and philosophical, almost actionless, pages of *The Magic Mountain*. This, his greatest book, is purely and simply a study in spiritual disintegration, whose characters, moving against the unreal background of a remote and secluded place, seem almost impossibly weak and futile, destined for disaster one and all as they beat in vain against the confines of their private Alpine world. The last pages of the book, which are concerned, in peculiarly apocalyptic manner, with the World War, are passionately and lyrically full of questioning and prophetic despair; it is not surprising that Mann, now an exile from Germany, has turned from such dilemmas to Biblical times in his recent novels, as though it had grown at last too painful to contemplate the universal agony of contemporary society.

Oswald Spengler, prophet, historian, and philosopher, presents in his work and character the appearance of a stern judge, the last of a line of thinkers whom the bourgeois genius of Nietzsche has inspired to thunderous condemnation. *The Decline of the West*, with all of its faults, is not only a great philosophy of history; it

symbolizes the last attempt in modern times to synthesize, correlate, and unify into some intelligible form the wide-spread multitude of historical events and movements which has culminated in middle class society, an industrial civilization, and dictatorship. Guided by inexorable dictates, it remains the harsh swan-song of the western world; like a noble Stoic surveying the ruins of the Roman empire, it is with the words of Seneca—*Ducunt Fata volentem, nolentem trahunt*—that Spengler closes his book. Not all of its abstruse ideology or, at times, improbable analogies, can obscure its genuine importance as at once a profound record and an indictment of a society inescapably in the clutches of Caesarism and decay.

Criticism of Spengler's work has been largely concerned with the scholarship involved, with picking holes in his truly vast erudition; it is not possible, however, wholly to controvert the conclusions of the second volume, in which he analyzes the capitalist system. These sombre pages, extreme and perhaps too deeply colored by the superhuman philosophy of his master, still constitute an accurate diagnosis of society's ills. However stubborn the idealism which rejects it, however optimistic the mind which seeks, in spite of reality, to see the world in brighter hue, it cannot shake the fundamental truth which gives to *The Decline of the West* its lonely eminence and stark power as an explanation of sociological decline in terms of historical recurrence. It takes its place with *Ulysses* and *Remembrance of Things Past* as an account of the forces to which modern culture has fallen prey, and brings to the subject all the resources of historical scholarship to amplify the psychological analyses of the other two great books. If the society pictured by these three writers—Joyce, Proust, and Spengler—can yet survive and grow strong, as the phoenix from its cyclical ashes, we shall be witnesses to a miracle—for nothing short of a miracle seems necessary to halt the progress of the world toward disaster. But is not the "Deus ex machina" a purely dramatic and wholly artificial device? The miracle of modern science and technics has been marvellous enough; are we to hope for a greater one?

## II

The progressive decay of bourgeois culture in several of its as-

pects has been analyzed with varying degrees of subtlety and accuracy and from somewhat dissimilar points of view in such books as Julien Benda's *Belphegor*, Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, Señor José Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses*, and in the massive work of Spengler.<sup>3</sup> In England, its symptoms and expression have been delineated with devastating malice in the ghastly chit-chat of Evelyn Waugh and in the more substantial satire of Aldous Huxley.<sup>4</sup> Almost all the French novels of the last decade, with a few exceptions and these consciously intended as condemnations of the decadence their authors see about them, exhibit a desolate state of rotting civilization; one has only to read a recent small book on the modern French novel<sup>5</sup> to be convinced that France, at least in the realm of fiction, has lost the much-advertised place she has held in the front rank of world culture. This volume, intended solemnly as an encouragement to readers of the French novel, defeats its purpose with comical zeal; for the impression its author leaves upon the reader is that the modern French novel is a loathesome fungus hanging limply against a tottering tree, a form of art without vitality or appeal, feeding upon caprice, selfishness, luxury, and complete heartlessness, and choosing as its most frequent themes the sadism, bored cosmopolitanism, lust for meaningless action, and the flattery of middle-class ideals of an age which has long forgotten Voltaire, Pascal, and Hugo. Of Italy and Germany it is needless to speak; a creeping and utterly repulsive subservience toward Fascism is in both countries at once the chief element and the true measure of current literature.

In America, however, this dismal state of affairs has not progressed quite so far because, as John Strachey points out, American capitalism is still in a more healthy and youthful stage than that

<sup>3</sup>BELPHEGOR: ESSAI SUR L'ESTHETIQUE DE LA PRESENTE SOCIETE FRANCAISE; Julien Benda, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1919.

LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION; Leon Trotsky, trans. by Rose Strunsky; New York, International Publishers, 1925.

THE REVOLT OF THE MASSES; José Ortega y Gasset, trans. from the Spanish; New York, W. W. Norton, 1932.

THE DECLINE OF THE WEST; Oswald Spengler, trans. from the German by C. F. Atkinson; two vols., New York, A. A. Knopf, 1926-28.

<sup>4</sup>See Evelyn Waugh's DECLINE AND FALL; VILE BODIES; A HANDFUL OF DUST; and Aldous Huxley's POINT COUNTER POINT; New York, Doubleday Doran, EYELESS IN GAZA; New York, Harpers, 1936.

<sup>5</sup>FRENCH NOVELISTS OF TODAY; Milton H. Stansbury, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1935.

of the Old World. Yet even here, to an observer who has lived long in touch with the American scene, many aspects of dissolution in literature are evident. That incapacity to distinguish between sentiment and reason, between confusion and unity, between tradition and false standards of art, which Julien Benda deplored in writing of French aesthetics over eighteen years ago, can be seen on every hand; that rise of the dregs of the social orders to power in the political field which Señor Ortega y Gasset has, on a suggestion from the population-statistics of Werner Sombart, elaborated upon as the very essence of a Fascist society, is becoming more apparent.

The tendencies and methods shown in the works of Sinclair Lewis, William Faulkner, Robinson Jeffers, and Ernest Hemingway have been analyzed with an almost exhaustive completeness and with a rare understanding in the latter part of Mr. Granville Hicks' *The Great Tradition*. I can do little more than recapitulate and amplify, where possible, his results. This is made all the more feasible by the remarkable lack of *parti pris* and personal politico-philosophical bias which distinguishes Mr. Hicks among Communist critics of literature; and it is my chief concern here to sketch the general motives, together with the absence of constructive elements, which characterize the work of these writers.

Sinclair Lewis, using the rapid and wholly inartistic method of the superior journalist, has sought to satirize in broad terms the same phenomena in American life which Mencken attacked for so many years before he retreated into scholarship and meditation, wisely deeming his purpose well accomplished. The American bourgeoisie has been the target of Lewis's unsubtle satire since he began to write novels; but each year has seen him less and less capable of dealing with his formidable theme in terms of the exquisite nuance and understanding we normally associate with great satire. The entire viewpoint of his writing has entailed the complete avoidance of the constructive principle most good literature reveals; he has failed to offer a substitute or a new way of life for that which America has been content to follow; in *It Can't Happen Here*, he has definitely taken refuge in the position he seems always to have held: the position of the sturdy American liberal who trusts in the fundamental sanity and ability of his

class to cope valiantly (although unrealistically) with the menacing forces of the present.

Invaluable as his work has been in revealing to us the fatuous complacency of the middle classes, their blissful acquiescence in the material values of our movie-magazine, Radio City culture, it has not been enough. No Voltaire, he has refrained from crying "Écrasez l'infame" and giving at least a hint, if not a complete guide, to a way of life more satisfying to the spirit.

He has not, however, fallen into the "cult of cruelty" exemplified by William Faulkner, Robinson Jeffers, and Ernest Hemingway. No reader of their books can fail to see the intense revulsion and cold hatred which certain elements of American life awaken in these writers. Without attempting to define their viewpoint, and scrupulously avoiding any attitude or disposition toward reform, they have described in their several styles the most appalling and sinister features of modern existence, as though fascinated by the picture.

William Faulkner is perhaps the least constructive of the three; his work reveals no indication of sympathy, hope or salvation for the degenerate Southerners he has taken as his theme. It is true that part of *Sanctuary*—the description of Popeye's youth—may be regarded as an attempt at sociological case-history and, to that extent, betraying a quasi-professional interest in the sources and reasons for the villainy which makes the book so shocking. The same may be said for passages in his other books; Faulkner is never wholly blind to the root of the evils he chooses to depict, and my feeling is that he is very much aware of it. But, as a whole, books like *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, *As I Lay Dying*, and some of the stories in *These 13* are interesting merely for their sheer macabre horrors: there is no inkling of anything higher or more preferable, no evidence of discrimination or choice among the fictional materials Faulkner uses to illustrate an intolerable physical and moral decay. His work lacks the contrasting lights or the ethical force which lift the realism of Balzac, for example, out of the human pig sty. His work is the crowning illustration in modern fiction of a warped and ultimately sterile artistic and social attitude, made all the more fearful and ominous by the fact that it plainly shows a complete despair for mankind, at least the mankind who populate his novels. Yet as a symptom of that universal deterioration

that grips modern society and as a revelation of certain aspects of American life, his books, for all their apparent pointlessness, are valuable documents. However, it may be added that the urge to find a way out of this situation for the poor whites of the South can be seen in the works of Erskine Caldwell, who, unlike Mr. Faulkner, is strengthened by a revolutionary social philosophy.

Ernest Hemingway has for a long time basked in the glow of a reputation unwarranted by the quality and slightness of his published work. A gift for reproducing American idiom which recalls Ring Lardner, a keen grasp of significant action and gesture, an ability to condense remarkably an incident into a few monosyllables of conversation have drawn to him a following of sophisticated moderns. Definitely a better short-story writer than a novelist, Hemingway has scorned any attempt to achieve social significance in his fiction and has been content to reproduce a few limited aspects of existence among gamblers, horse-race men, bull fighters, and soldiers. No one could conceive of a more dreary and inconsequential novel than *The Sun Also Rises*, which reveals the despair and aimlessness of the war-time generation Miss Stein has earmarked "lost". If there is any artistic purpose behind this series of barroom scenes and dull love-making, this account of spasmodic moral resolutions defeated by ennui, it may be only the sincere desire, once more, to document moral decline with vignettes of its expression in the Paris of the days just after the World War. But the vagueness of the entire book, its lack of clear-cut characters, dispels even this ray of light upon the intentions of the author.

Mr. Hemingway's later work, dealing with bull fighting and big game hunting, contains his naïve solution for the dilemma of the writer in the Machine Age: his recipe calls for the surrender to headlong action and the courting of physical danger, in the bull ring if one wishes or in the jungle, but anywhere save in the arena of social conflict or in the realm of intellectual activity. Hemingway has taken one of the two avenues of escape for the artist described by Edmund Wilson in the later pages of *Axel's Castle*: the life of action for its own sake or the life of art for art's sake; he has lost the last shred of any higher purpose he may once have had, the

purpose we can discover in such words as these, written by a younger and more enthusiastic writer, Mr. William Saroyan:<sup>6</sup>

I don't know if it is ever possible for anyone actually to improve life, and I imagine that it isn't, but all the same I think it is worth while to want to, and the more I think about this, the more I am convinced that this is essentially the job of every man who writes, and that anything else any of us do is irrelevant.

The novel is, after all, an inferior type of literature; although great things have been done with it in the past, its potentialities for variety of form seem exhausted and it depends more and more upon shocking sensation and mass of detail, less upon subtlety of characterization and planned harmonious proportions, for its best effects. It flourishes most widely in an age, such as the present, of high literacy, universal boredom, and falling critical standards, but, because it reaches a larger public and can be put to a greater variety of uses than other types of literature, it is a most powerful vehicle, amorphous as it is, for the expression of the ideas and impulses which actuate the mass of society.

But it is in poetry that the symbols of an age can be most significantly framed, its most subtle yearnings and inarticulate urges most satisfactorily and permanently expressed. Man, in the intellectual and inquiring state of mind, needs the symbols for ideas which only poetry can give him; this is why, even in a time as apparently unfriendly to poetry as the present one (in spite of 40,000 or more poets in America), poetry can reveal phases of consciousness and interpret stages of being which the novel, with its clumsier technique, cannot so adequately contain. And it is in the work of two American poets that we may see again examples of the revulsion, indecision, and bewilderment that have fallen upon the greater share of literature today.

Power and the poetry of Robinson Jeffers are almost synonymous terms. Seldom has a poet written in our country with so much terrible force of utterance, such Hebraic thunder; for one must realize that Jeffers stands in the old tradition of the poet as preacher and that his chief motive in writing is moral and didactic.

<sup>6</sup>INHALE AND EXHALE; William Saroyan, Random House, New York, 1936: "Panorama Unmerciful", p. 241.

Even the long, loose formless rhythms of his poetry indicate his kinship with the prophets of Israel; diffuse, paratactic, and swollen with the lightnings of sudden baleful phrases. His message, to use a convenient word although one with unfortunate connotations, is also as forbidding and cheerless as that of Jeremiah. For this austere son of a minister, living a life of work and reflection upon his eyrie at Carmel, has no hope to give humanity: worms that deserve only crushing deserve, likewise, no hope.

In his long poems such as "The Tower Beyond Tragedy", "Tamar", "Roan Stallion" and especially "The Women At Point Sur", Jeffers has sought to express in gigantic, fearful, almost grotesque symbols his cold hatred for humanity, for a civilization which, in his words, "has very evidently turned the corner down hill". These symbols are briefly: the destructive phenomena of Nature, the ocean, storms, earthquakes, fire; in the human sphere, incest, madness, cruelty, murder, and pain. Uttered in sometimes confused and difficult, always forceful and striking, terms, his judgment is the same: humanity is not worth saving, the best thing that could happen to it would be total annihilation. There is an apparent contradiction here, of course, scarcely worth pointing out; but it seems somewhat unreasonable to strain for violent images and to create a whole gallery of mad characters such as those in "The Women At Point Sur" in order to give forth a doctrine so simple and, in some ways to logical minds, so completely satisfying as this. After all, a humanity so base and decadent as the one Jeffers describes (and, incidentally, so difficult to reconcile with the actual California countryside these characters move in) might best be accorded silence at the most, the silence of the thoroughly disillusioned sceptic; it is hardly worth so many volumes of strong poetry, all with the same merciless intent. Yet, as with the prophets, intolerable spleen will not permit silence, though speech brings only the need for more and more speech, until the end is hysteria.

In human pain Jeffers finds his most satisfactory symbol; it is in the will to endure all the malignities of Nature and human nature that he sees one small spark of nobility in man. Passages in "Thurso's Landing" show this plainly; but he is consistent in his other works also on this point. In *Solstice and Other Poems*, his latest book, it appears again, as unmistakably as elsewhere, from the first remarkable historical drama, "At the Birth of an Age",

based on the Niebelung saga, to the shorter poems; the contrast between the complete unfeeling of Nature and man's suffering (feeble noble in a creature otherwise wholly vile) is relentlessly and frequently drawn. If only men were hawks or stones or other instinctive or unfeeling or utterly unconscionable things, it seems that the universe of Jeffers' imagination would be complete in its admirable bleakness. But failing this impossible transformation, then annihilation, even through war, is preferable:

We are easy to manage, a gregarious people,  
Full of sentiment, clever at mechanics,  
and we love our luxuries.

but for "the poor doll humanity",

I honestly believe (but really an alien here:  
trust me not)  
Blind war, compared to this kind of life,  
Has nobility, famine has dignity.

Luxury weakens the moral fibre; Caesarism and war, pain and destruction are the bitter remedies for this decay:

The beauty of modern  
Man is not in the persons but in the  
Disastrous rhythm, the heavy and mobile masses,  
the dance of the  
Dream-led masses down the dark mountain.

And while Jeffers watches in contemptuous fascination this inevitable marching of man toward destruction, choosing for his own refuge the contemplation of the wheeling hawk, not the life of pure action—

Pure action would make a good life, let it be sharp—  
Set between the throat and the knife.—

he has nothing else to say to modern man in his poeticizing of the Spenglerian philosophy, and even appears to gloat at the tremendous misery and evil he looks upon, free himself from the necessity of engaging in more of it than comes to any economically self-sufficient, happily married and housed member of the intellectual bourgeoisie. His prophet's voice is not a leader's voice any more than that of any poet who has ever lived; he will not come down from his mountain. There is only death and hatred in his symbols; he mirrors his age pitilessly, exactly, with the revulsion of Swift and with hideous sterility, for any moral force the reader may

gather from his poems. More unerringly because more briefly and with the insight of a poet, he illustrates the *cul-de-sac* into which contemporary history has fallen.

There is one poet in America today who could, if he wished, voice, with an incision born of meticulous art and intellectual conviction, the words which the times demand, a supreme summation of the impasse now faced by literature and to be broken only by clear statement and action. This poet is Archibald MacLeish. He is a man who has won for himself a place in modern poetry by the hardest work, the highest artistic integrity, and a gift for expression matched by very few American poets writing today—at most, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Robert Frost.

It is of the extreme importance to note that MacLeish has turned more and more, of late years, to specifically social themes, the themes of conflict and struggle out of which the literature of the future will draw its greatest inspiration. For this very reason his writing has excited more comment from the leftist critics than the work of any other American poet of his stature; the keenest of them probably see that in MacLeish the leftist movement would claim its most redoubtable poetic voice if he could bring himself to join it. Thus far he has not announced his sympathy with any political or social philosophy, although his writing shows the influence of the revolutionary point of view. Three things have restrained him, I feel—his too great love of man and woman and their love, his jealous care for artistic integrity, and his class background.

None of these is an unsurmountable obstacle to that definite expression of his leanings he has all but made in at least several of his recent poems. All of these inner imperatives are thoroughly understandable; they are the checks upon the eagerness of many middle-class writers who might, otherwise, throw in their lot with what Mr. Hicks has truly named "the great tradition". But for MacLeish the love of man and woman is the most serious hindrance to the step that some can only hope he will soon take—for his genius has been from the first that of the writer of highly polished and restrained love-lyrics, and in his most passionate approaches to the theme of social conflict, it is the almost melodramatic motif of love between man and woman—as between McGafferty

and his mistress, Ione, in the verse-play *Panic*— that breaks the flow of his thought toward what one hoped would be the inevitable and clearly expressed conclusion of his original theme.

It is, of course, useless to berate a poet for not writing as one wishes he might; he always obeys the command of his own vision of reality and the unreal. His methods, when he is, like MacLeish, a true creator, are his own, his conclusions those he has set for himself within the pattern of his original plan. It is, further, vain and meaningless to attach labels to him, the invidious labels of Fascist,<sup>\*</sup> Communist, reactionary. Nothing is so simple as that in criticism, nothing that is not without qualification and degree. There are no immutable laws or dogmas which all must accept, and it does not serve to attach tickets, call names, arrange categories of any sort that must be constantly enlarged beyond any real usefulness. Its terminology, especially when borrowed from current history, is in continual and exasperating flux; its standards change noticeably and often radically from age to age.

No one can say that in such a poem as "The German girls! the German girls!" MacLeish has not expressed quite definitely his attitude of distaste for at least one phase of Fascism in Germany—and his "Speech to those who say Comrade", while hostile to all comrade-sayers, is yet a most truthful denunciation of clap-trap slogan and mere words mistaken for proof of sincere belief in any particular social philosophy. To date, his verse-play *Panic* is his longest and most direct expression of what he really thinks of a specific social and chiefly economic problem. The play, written in accordance with a technique of prosody admirably suited for its theme, is based upon a most significant event in contemporary history—the stock market collapse of 1929. McGafferty, its chief character, might conceivably stand for a financier as portentous as J. P. Morgan; the movement of the play gains a tremendous dramatic effect from the recently precipitated conflict between finance-capital and the middle and working classes which narrowly escaped being a major crisis of an ominous nature only through the ap-

<sup>\*</sup>As John Strachey has done, in a lecture entitled *Literature and Dialectical Materialism*; Covici Friede, New York, 1934: this criticism was inspired solely by MacLeish's poem "Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City" and requires some modification in the light of poetry since published by Mr. MacLeish, particularly *Panic* (1935) and *Public Speech* (1936).

plication of the bank-moratorium. A group of weak-spined bankers and a small "mob" of radicals furnish an additional study in contrast and dramatic tension. The play ends in the suicide of McGafferty, after his mistress, who has pleaded in vain with him to save the banks of the nation, has left the room.

The poetry of the play is of a quite superior sort; the theme is timely and the action well-handled—this would be the justifiable dictum of any competent critic. But something is lacking, some point and meaning left unexpressed or too vaguely hinted at; the play does not crystallize into the definite outline and totality of effect one awaits from the first line to the last—"Man's fate is a drum!" In the first place, there is too much mystical pother, reminiscent of Eugene O'Neill's most mystical dithyrambs, about secret, unseen menaces, whether the menace of revolution or fascism, of moral dissolution on the part of the bankers (clearly patterned after the spineless chorus of old men in the "Agamemnon") and McGafferty, or something melodramatically fatalistic composed of both. The play does not quite come off; and beyond a few good lines uttered by the blind radical (another figure whose symbolism is ambiguous), one is left to grope for a general meaning and coherence. Ione, the mistress of McGafferty, is well in character; one does not much regret her inclusion in the play since it gives the author the opportunity for a number of fine lines on his most enthralling and best beloved theme—the love between man and woman. Yet it must be confessed we gather no more meaning, no more of an explanation of the author's purpose from her lips than from McGafferty's; and two of her lines during the intense latter part of the play seem lifted from the pages of *True Story Magazine*: "Nothing matters".

Nothing matters any more but us.

The tendency, if not the purpose, of this play is, however, clear. MacLeish is alive to the intolerable paradoxes of the age; and through the mysticism which befogs the earlier part of the play we can see that he can, if he wishes, place the blame for the financial chaos he writes of not upon some weird Presence or other but upon the shoulders of the financiers where, of course, it belongs. And this very evasion, cleverly handled as it is and employed with an eye upon stage-effectiveness, keeps the play from the outspoken-

ness of propaganda. This is perhaps what MacLeish wishes to avoid most of all—the brand of “propaganda” from the middle-class critics who have been so complacent with his work thus far. Yet his caution, however, justifiable on the grounds of his conception of art, does more harm to his reputation than he can fail to realize; the disinclination to speak out clearly, he knows, will not reconcile his art to those who demand instinctively that he declare himself. Already, past forty and still young, he is uttering the wearied phrases we hear from many other perplexed liberals; he can foresee that he and his work will matter little in the rush of events to come:

Let them go over us all I say with the thunder of  
What's to be next in the world. It's we will be under it !

It is not to be supposed that this brief sketch of a few significant writers is offered here as a glib résumé of contemporary literature or that the conclusions hinted at and the tendencies indicated hold true for the great mass of modern writing. Nor is any word here to be construed as a slur upon the excellent artistry and technique used by these writers. I have been interested chiefly in the sum-total of essential moods and attitudes displayed in their works. The greater share of books now poured forth upon the public reveal nothing of the darkness and heroic despair I have emphasized. A far less gloomy view of life appears in it, one of average lives spent in a round of harmless but rather empty pleasure, toil and daily drama. They are regional tales, wistfully praising the stout pioneers of Kansas; historical novels describing the reconstruction of the South; crisp lyrics concerning New England country scenes; plays which are full of the theme of young love on the streets of New York, let us say. The problems and themes which are engaging the full attention of a small but growing group of writers known as proletarian or revolutionary or, possibly, with the customary vagueness of the term, Communist—these do not attract the majority of those who write for a living or for art, or both.

Literature in the mass is a repetition of worn themes, a constant recurrence to dry fountainheads of incident, mood, plot, and method. It is not, furthermore, the sordid subject which repells

<sup>1</sup>From “Dover Beach”—a note to that poem; in *Public Speech* (1936).

the ordinary writer; he is only too ready to believe if his writing is drab enough and full of slums or slumming that he is facing the world today as it really is, in large part at least. But to question, condemn, or present alternatives for the ills he cannot help but see and has finally been forced to acknowledge in his books—this is not within his view of the writer's special function.

### III

Speaking of Russian Futurism, Trotsky says: "When the War and the Revolution began, Futurism was still Bohemian, which is a normal condition for every new literary school in capitalistic cities".<sup>4</sup> He offers no further comment upon this statement; but surely there could be no more telling indication of the conditions under which literary movements are forced to exist in a capitalistic social system: they must, until the happy and infrequent event of their adoption by bourgeois critics and readers, maintain themselves furtively, outlawed, suspect, and despised, until they have cast aside those elements of doctrine which appear dangerous to the social and, in particular, the economic *status quo*; or, failing to placate the more powerful of the standard critics, have perished utterly through defiance or a fundamental lack of strength and determination in their proponents or their program.

The absence of considerable literary movements today is to be explained, if at all, mainly on historical grounds, although, of course, it is vain to insist that history alone holds the answer to the question. One may begin by comparing this state of affairs with that which existed in the past, and from the comparison draw some idea of the causes.

The swiftly heightened social consciousness of the nineteenth century as expressed in literature was, in reaction against the politically quietistic paternalism and callous social neglect of the eighteenth century, the principal force behind the Romantic movement. It took, in its early phase, the form of a revolt throughout western Europe against political and, especially, monarchical despotism. When, toward the middle of the century, the triumph of political democracy and strengthened constitutional government, preceded by the effectual destruction of the divine right of kings, gave the

<sup>4</sup>LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION. Leon Trotsky (1925), p. 13.

Romantics no further immediate objectives for attack, they turned to a critical examination of the problems which were the fruits of their victory. What engaged their interest henceforth were the apparently no less incendiary subjects of humanitarianism, science, evolution, and their inevitable concomitant, the higher criticism of religion.

Even more promising than political revolution as the basis of an improved social philosophy, these were destined, however, to become more and more merely new forms of academic discussion and to lose their original re-vivifying effect in the field of literature by being so thoroughly absorbed in the body of general thought as to become no longer capable of providing startling inspirations in letters. They became the property of the professors because men of letters had not learned to use them as more than passing novelties in building the literary Utopia of which we catch rare glimpses in the works of most of the great nineteenth century critics, poets, and novelists. The Romantics fell back upon the comfortable vague inspiration of "Nature" until that too began to wear thin in the face of increasing specialization in branches of more substantial and practical learning.

As the century progressed and European imperialism lulled to sleep the last rebellious voices of Carlyle and Ruskin, as Kipling and Chamberlain, not Marx and Engels, became the official representative prophets of their age, literature could do no more than to seek a refuge in the ivory tower of Symbolism, in art for art's sake, Hardian fatalism, the sheer aestheticism of Pater or the brilliant but hopelessly unheard satire of Meredith. Letters gradually lost the sense of orientation which they had begun to find even in the confusion of intellectual forces which makes the mid-nineteenth century so fascinating a period for the literary historian. Kings and tyrants were real opponents; but when economic imperialism in all its complex ramifications supplanted the seen with the unseen enemy, a generation of writers schooled in the elementary principles of a crudely emotional revolutionary tactic lost heart and found only bewilderment and lack of direction amid the universal clamor of bourgeois prosperity and the revival of monarchy in certain countries.

Yet literature became, to all appearances at least, no less char-

acteristic an expression of the age than it had been earlier, although it was now reduced to the rôle of spectator, no longer actor, in the drama then playing upon the stage of European civilization. Lone voices—Nietzsche, Mazzini, Zola, Meredith—remained to cry caution as the new utilitarianism and social patterns came into being. Romantic fiction, for example, continued to be written, and in greater quantity than before; but it was the Romantic fiction of Stevenson and Barrie. The domestic novel now became that of Mrs. Humphrey Ward, worlds away from the substantial art and wide scope of George Eliot. Poets of Browning's stature ceased to appear; the reader had, instead, to content himself with "Barrack Room Ballads" or Gilbert and Sullivan. What became increasingly clear was the late-century decline in literary power and the lamentable estrangement of letters from any vital and serious motive. The destruction wrought upon the integrity of the arts by the growing capitalist system, its well-nigh universal stifling of one of the finest expressions of the human spirit in the pitiful trickle of *fin de siècle* writing, its thoroughly crass and anti-social influence upon the creative instincts, are further symbolized even by the subtle discouragement of that critical talent which some have held to be the most representative feature of literary genius in our Byzantine twentieth century: for there has arisen no critic in our day who might be spoken of in the same breath with Arnold or Carlyle, Sainte Beuve or Nietzsche. In the place of a Romanticism run to seed in Symbolism, we have had Dada, Surrealism, Imagism, Vorticism, Cubism, neo-classicism, religionism, agrarianism, mysticism of great variety, all equally sterile and all equally cults of a few, not movements which can gain the huge following and enthusiastic assent of many writers. There is certainly some meaning in the fact, however incomplete this analysis, that as capitalism has grown and swallowed the world, the great currents of literature have run to a bare streamlet. One may believe that ours is a period of rest and preparation for other great movements in art and letters: one must conclude that it is, instead, the very hour of passivity that follows strangulation, and that the trivial stirrings of the body one sees in these minor movements still lingering are but the twitchings of what is already a corpse. To lay this fatal condition without qualification at the doors of capitalism

is not an act of feverish bewilderment or jealous intent: it is merely historical fact, as unavoidable as the tides. What can revive the world of literature from its present numbness remains yet unknown, although many speak boldly of it already and call it "Communism"; nothing can be more certain than the bare statement: history in a period of decay completes itself in all its manifestations and in all arts, including literature.

## IV

A significant feature of contemporary literature is the total lack of great heroes, naturally not in the Classical sense but neither in the Romantic sense. The last great heroes in fiction and poetry passed away with the earlier French and English Romantic writers. Great literature does not usually fail to produce heroes; even the eighteenth century in England could still create one or two, if only Tom Jones; the nineteenth century in Europe gave rise to a number of them—Hernani, d'Artagnan, Cyrano.

These were, in themselves, re-creations from a remoter and more colorful past; yet they expressed much of the surging life and hope of the nineteenth century, fraught with opportunity, achievement, conquest, possibilities. No heroes at all approaching these have been created as the symbols of our time; indeed, the success of such books as MacLeish's *Conquistador* and Hervey Allen's *Anthony Adverse* must be ascribed to the wistful desire, in an age admittedly more oppressed by purely economic cares and materialism than any previous one, for some escape into a larger and freer atmosphere. The public will always applaud a true hero, some figure to which the reader can render spiritual allegiance; but sooner than elevate the characteristic personalities of the present, a Rockefeller or a Mellon, a Northcliffe or a Beaverbrook, into that rôle, it will seek the paler and essentially no more satisfy-

\*See THE GREAT TRADITION (1935), Granville Hicks; PROLETARIAN LITERATURE IN THE UNITED STATES: AN ANTHOLOGY; with a critical introduction by Joseph Freeman; International Publishers, New York (1935); AMERICAN WRITERS CONGRESS; edited by Henry Hart; International Publishers, (1935); "Some Revolutionary Trends in English Poetry": John Lehmann, 1930-35, in *International Literature*, April (1936) 60-83; for a searching analysis of purposive action from the philosopher's point of view, see also PERMANENCE AND CHANGE: AN ANATOMY OF PURPOSE; Kenneth Burke, New Republic, Inc., New York. (1935).

ing creations of the cinema or will accept, as in the case of the two books just mentioned, a type of re-creation which grows more and more difficult to make real in an increasingly un-Romantic period.

There are at least two valid reasons for the lack of great heroes in fiction today: one is the impossibility of giving to most contemporary actions the guise of greatness until time, *sub specie aeternitatis et humanitatis*, has emphasized and stiffened their true perspectives and motives; and, second, the utter absurdity of the suggestion I have heard expressed, with a good deal of seriousness, by a conservative scholar (who was momentarily led astray from his specialty so far as to speak of recent literature) that the modern capitalist is a fit subject for good fiction. True, attempts have been made to put him into dignified literature; certainly there is no dearth of enthusiastic biographies of these latter-day Napoleons. But surely we know too much about their public and private lives<sup>20</sup> ever to do more than laugh at such an idea.

The truth is simple: the temper of modern capitalism is completely alien to the idea of a hero, and all such phrases as "the captains of industry", "the standard-bearers of modern civilization", or even the "heroes of science" are so inseparably bound up with the facile deceits of the advertising agent that they can arouse little more than a cynical sneer. This does not mean that men like Pasteur or Edison or Osler have, in themselves, no heroic proportions; it is rather that the environment under which they, and lesser men, have accomplished their works as well as some of the uses to which the results of their labors have been put are impossible of treatment in terms of great fiction.

Perhaps we look backward too much to the Homeric, the Arthurian, the Elizabethan ages, or to the world of Dumas and Hugo; but if we are to look for the great hero today we must find him in men like Lenin, or in ranks of society hitherto outside the pale of hero-making in literature. The last *military* hero, so-called, died in St. Helena; the hold he has retained upon the affections of the French people and the imagination of the world is amazing, especially when one considers the pathetic residue of his achievements. (Incidentally, it is with a great shock that we realize fully

<sup>20</sup>See *THE ROBBER BARONS*, Matthew Josephson, and a number of similar books.

the vast emptiness, the colossal unmeaningness of so meteoric a career as that of Napoleon. It left nothing of permanent value behind it in France; it merely delayed for a quarter of a century the full development of democratic nationalism in that country. It turned the Revolution into that blind worship of Force of which Mazzini has spoken so wisely in his essay on M. Renan and France. Outside of France it left even less of a trace. It caused England to consolidate and strengthen her bourgeois conservatism, drawing in upon herself the tentacles of the Industrial Age. It did not affect the German states; before the greatest menace to their safety since their salvation from the chaos of the Thirty Years War by Gustavus Adolphus, they did not unite. In the face of a more formidable enemy than even Richelieu, they did not invoke the gods of nationalism and stave him off alone. They simply sat where they were until the time of Bismarck. Italy, too, was merely plundered; it was to be tempered into national consciousness only by her great triumvirate, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Cavour.)

The hollowness of mere victory and force—*Victrix causa dei placuit, sed victis Catoni*—cannot be more clearly revealed than in the life and deeds of one whom France looks upon, with a curious absence of rational criticism, as her greatest modern hero. The Gallic heart almost forgets to beat before the spectacle of such unprecedented audacity; and from the bones of the Moscow road, from the field of Waterloo, la belle France gathers a doubtful but shining glory. In the face of all sententiousness, including Spengler's, I venture to say that Napoleon actually means nothing more than another bloody legend; he can certainly mean nothing today, when we are already beginning to discount, in the haze of eighteen years' distance, the importance and enduring effect of the World War, an immeasurably greater event to modern history than Napoleon's brief mastery of Europe.

What did Napoleon leave behind him? We are at a loss to reply until we remember the Code Napoléon and its heavy burden upon the backs of Latin women in Europe and South America, with its tedious harking back to the Romans; until we remember the Legion of Honor, futile source of red ribbons; the plundered treasures of the Louvre, gathered from Egypt and Italy and the rest of Europe; that absurd romantic yearning back to monarch-

ism which is still so incredible and grotesque a force in French politics; and lastly, with a glance toward Hitler, the many hatreds he left behind him against France, never fully slaked at Sedan.

In the face of such banality among rulers, it is less than absurd to look toward the petty successors of Napoleon in Europe for the models of heroes in the military sense; *The Dynasts* long ago exhausted this vein.

Not that men of true heroic rank may not arise, together with writers who can adequately present them to us in literature; but neither exists today in a society so dominated in spite of its dictators by the fashion of believing that it is the masses, not the individual, who determine the course of history. Indeed, from the standpoint of the literary critic there is much to recommend an interpretation of history based so largely upon the part played in society by economic, not political, forces. There is something so un-Romantic and unsuited to important fiction or poetry in the petty Caesars, the industrial and financial world-figures of our time, that only one form of literature could hope to deal with them competently—satire. Yet where, except for Shaw and Huxley, are the capable satirists of the day?

It is, in fact, in a mood of obscure irony that a considerable group of writers has proceeded, in direct reaction against the Romantic hero-making propensity, toward what José Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish philosopher and anti-democrat, has aptly called the "dishumanization" of art.<sup>11</sup> This tendency consists in the attempt to eliminate from literature all vestiges of the human and social elements, to render art abstract, obscure, unintelligible except to a few. Literature, to these select practitioners of it, becomes a system of elaborate metaphor drawn from science, mathematics, personal theorizing, but as little as possible from the vast store of imagery used by writers in the past. The fruitless attempt to approximate in literature the objectivity and ab-

<sup>11</sup>OBRAS; José Ortega y Gasset, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1932; pp. 895-896. He sums up his thesis as follows: "If one analyzes the new style of art, one finds in it certain completely consistent tendencies. It tends toward 1. the dishumanization of art; 2. to avoid living forms; 3. to make the work of art only a work of art; 4. to consider art as a game, and nothing more; 5. toward an essential irony; 6. to avoid all falsity, and, therefore, toward a scrupulous realization. In brief, 7., art, according to the younger school, is without any sort of transendency." (My translation).

straction of mathematics has resulted in a turning topsy-turvy of the entire realm of spiritual values thus far exploited by the less ambitious; and it has also resulted in its more extreme manifestations—Stein, Cummings, Pound, et al.—in a desperate divorce ment of art from human and social ideals or images. Although Señor Ortega y Gasset mentions few names and, indeed expresses little interest in the actual achievements of these “dishumanizers” of art, he attributes the origin of the movement to Debussy in music, and to Mallarmé in literature. Max Eastman has spoken of this very subject in somewhat similar terms, and has coined the now classic phrase, “the cult of unintelligibility”.<sup>12</sup>

All such attempts at a new conception of art are evidence of an extreme reaction against traditional standards and against theories of aesthetics long accepted by the bourgeoisie. A feeling of inadequacy in regard to the old symbols and images has led to a complete renunciation of them; to the extent that it is realized new symbols must be made, new aesthetics reasoned out for a world so different from the old one, that art cannot proceed and renew itself under the old values and standards, this movement is a fruitful and creative one; but, in the last analysis, it entails the ultimate decision to commit artistic suicide when it is discovered that the new images lead merely to the isolation of a small group, lost in cloudy abstraction and theory.

Preoccupation with social and spiritual decay, the lack of truly important figures and movements, a tendency toward escape by making literature a non-human abstraction—these are some of the important features of literature today. The sketch that has been given involves, for its further explanation and completion, the treatment of other problems: the relation between the literature of the present and a literature more vital and meaningful; the methods, aims, and difficulties of this new literature; the connection between society and literature; the question of propaganda and letters, together with a number of considerations chiefly of a technical and less general nature. Since a specific condition of society, namely, the illness of a capitalistic world, is thought to lie at the root of this unhealthiness in art and letters, the argument must henceforth proceed in terms of the relation of literature to

<sup>12</sup>THE LITERARY MIND. Max Eastman (1931).

society, a problem once suggested but never analyzed by the French philosopher and sociologist, Guyau.

It is possible that the last decade of the nineteenth century was not a propitious time for anyone to treat this large question with profit; but we have so much more material evidence for conclusions, we are so much clearer as to the real nature of contemporary society, so many of the best minds have been almost exclusively concerned with both society and literature and the relationships of both, that it is a matter that may now lend itself more readily at least to partial explanation.

It is evident that any adequate criticism of literature must henceforth embrace, in keeping with the progress of knowledge in psychology, sociology, economics, and political science, the social environment in which literature arises and must not hesitate to question, if necessary, the sanctions and traditions at the basis of that environment. An adequate criticism of literature can no longer move along the lines followed by Arnold or Sainte-Beuve, although these men have still much to teach us; the force of purely literary and intellectual tradition weighs less and less with the world as it is constituted today; and no critic who is not at least passably acquainted with a number of branches of knowledge scarcely heard of by critics three generations ago can hope to gain the hearing of the public. However much we regret it (and the critical school of Mr. T. S. Eliot does keenly regret it to the point of determined reaction), criticism can no longer make way on the ground of Aristotelian-classical or Hegelian-Kantian-Romantic philosophic principles alone, a fact which I. A. Richards and others have realized in turning with a will to another tradition more strong today—that of science. The Pareto who will produce the arithmetic and geometry of literary criticism has not yet arisen: but criticism will tend to become an approximation to such an ideal analysis, stretching out to include economics, politics, anthropology, and psychology as well as history and literary tradition in seeking this goal.

by Helen Watts Estrich

## JESTING PILATE TELLS THE ANSWER

ALDOUS HUXLEY

**N**OT all writers are worth criticizing. Aldous Huxley is, often. And his recent companion books, *Eyeless in Gaza* and *Ends and Means*, (1937)\* in particular, deserve thoughtful criticism because in them he presents a philosophy and an ethics for us to take most seriously and, if we can, make good use of.

When Huxley comes to us with two books that actually offer a "new" way of thought and life—offer for our practical acceptance a cosmology and ethics as well as a number of specific suggestions for individual and social behavior—he finds us willing to be convinced. Our immediate reaction is that if Aldous Huxley has found a philosophy which he feels he can honestly accept and believe in, we can depend upon it that that philosophy has been critically examined by a mind as open to doubt as that of the most doubting among us. When Jesting Pilate says he has found the answer, we sit up and take notice.

But has he? He has tried and is trying strenuously. That answer, however, must be not only a philosophy that he can accept but also one that will bear good fruits—one that will act both as an end for, and a means to, the good means of individual and social behavior. For he wants earnestly, the world being threatened with disaster, to save us both immediately and permanently, and he feels along with many of us that we shall never be saved on any superficial basis, but only by some fundamental change in our points of view and consequent actions. We must be converted, in other words, to a "new life". So Huxley, himself, has set the example.

He was probably converted first to a new point of view and then, being Huxley, to a new philosophy, or at least the need for

\*Both books published by Harper & Bros., N. Y.

a new philosophy to support the new point of view. Here is the story of Aldous Huxley's conversion as he told it.<sup>1</sup>

...he himself had chosen to regard the whole process as either pointless or a practical joke. Yes, *chosen*. For it had been an act of the will... And now at last it was clear, now by some kind of immediate experience he knew that the point was in the paradox, in the fact that unity was the beginning and unity the end, and that in the meantime the condition of life and all existence was separation, which was equivalent to to evil.

Huxley has had, then, a revelation. Of course one cannot speak for him and say either that he had a mystical experience and was persuaded by it, or that he felt the social and intellectual necessity to be persuaded by a mystical experience and therefore prepared himself to have one. We know only that as *Huxley went about it* the right mystical experience could be used to support his new philosophy and thus help produce the desired results, and that his own "immediate experience" was of the "truth" that would fit most logically into the cosmology that would correlate most logically with the "ethic" that should most logically produce better conditions on this earth.

Huxley saw that the world was out of joint—that the social and economic systems stood in dire need of reform.

He was convinced that "desirable social changes can be brought about most effectively by changing the individuals who compose society." But the individuals need a good system of ethics and some forceful persuasion to follow it.

It seemed to him, therefore, that any system of ethics must rest on a cosmology.

He was able to formulate a cosmology which he could correlate with the kind of ethics he felt were necessary to the good individual and social life.

He supported this cosmology with evidence chosen from the discoveries of modern science and the mystical experience of himself and others.

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<sup>1</sup>In one of Anthony's meditations in *Eyeless in Gaza*, p. 470. In his meditations and diary, at least, I believe, as do the reviewers, that Anthony may be identified with Huxley, especially in view of the repetition and development in *Ends and Means* of ideas expressed by Anthony.

This is the house that Huxley built. Is it a good structure and how firm are its foundations?

## II

Huxley must have despaired of our ever evolving an ethics which we could accept for its own sake. Or perhaps from his own temperament he inferred a psychological necessity for a cosmological basis to ethics. He may have arrived at a conclusion somewhat as follows: what we want and need is general human happiness (and what we have is becoming in greater and greater jeopardy); that is the reason for any ethics—that is the end. (Social or economic reform, indeed, as an end in itself, can be a positive evil, producing anything but human happiness.) Most of the best authorities agree that the greatest happiness possible to man is freedom or non-attachment “to self and to . . . the things of this world” and that implies attachment to an ideal beyond and above every other reality and concept. If I can discover such an ideal, present it to the world and get people to accept it, we shall have a real working basis for reform, as well as the only sort of end worth reforming for.

Huxley chose for this ideal a cosmology, probably because a cosmology is likelier to produce good means than an ideal such as nationalism or imperialism (for which men have also lived) and because it can logically be accepted more universally. All peoples—“Aryan”, Jew, and Japanese—can accept the same cosmological ideal, as the spread of Christianity has shown.

“Every cosmology has its correlated ethic.” The cosmology attachment to which would make us free men should, preferably, involve an “ethic” itself conducive to greater freedom and non-attachment, especially since “the means employed determine the nature of the ends produced”.

Simply, the fundamental idea of Huxley’s cosmology is that the world is unity, though its manifestations are in a diversity of forms. The “ethic” which he has been able to correlate with that cosmology “has, as its fundamental principles, these propositions: Good is that which makes for unity; Evil is that which makes for separateness. . . Separateness is attachment and without non-attachment, no individual can achieve unity either with God,

or, through God, with other individuals." (*Ends and Means*, p. 351)

If the essential nature of the world is unity, it follows, he assumes, that unity is "good" and separation is "evil", even though the implication of such reasoning is certainly that most of existence as we are ordinarily conscious of it must be "evil".

Separation, diversity—conditions of our existence. . . But separation is evil. Evil, then, is the condition of life. . . (*Eyeless in Gaza*, p 469).

Assuming that unity is good, we find that the major virtues which make for goodness would also help produce a "free and just society fit for non-attached men and women to be members of and such, at the same time, as only non-attached men and women could organize." Those virtues are charity, intelligence and awareness. One must be aware, of course, in order to keep in touch with the spiritual ideal to which he forms his attachment and to comprehend the cosmology on which the ethics are based. Intelligence is necessary as a guide to charity and the minor virtues. And charity would be the most logical means to greater unity among people.

### III

The word *charity* Huxley uses in its biblical sense of love—love for its own sake and not for the sake of any of the various selfish satisfactions it may give us; those, for instance, of power and possession. Such disinterested love would clearly be a means to both non-attachment and unity with other individuals.

Most of us know one or two people of an older generation who seem to possess that kind of charity. They are gentle, thoughtful, and forbearing folk, infinitely trustworthy. For them, charity, with its accompanying serenity and tolerance, has its roots in a deep religious faith. Christianity has not inevitably, nor even very often, blessed its adherents with this virtue, but Huxley seems to be seeking a new religion or philosophy that will have implicit in its acceptance the practice of a very similar charity—one that will have, as that rare Christian charity has, its roots in awareness and other-worldliness. And he feels that a general rebirth of such love can come only along with a new spiritual foundation—that

we, too, need a sort of spiritual point of reference to keep always some place in our consciousness, against which to check our behavior.

Natural human perversity, moreover—all man's apparently innate bent towards animosity and separateness—if it can be changed at all (and others than Huxley have worked on the principle that in part, at least, it can) need the strongest persuasion to do the trick. How well Huxley knows this he shows by precept and example.

That which besets me [Anthony confesses in *Eyeless in Gaza*] is indifference. I can't be bothered about people. Or rather I won't...the non-job of personal relations...is disagreeable and laborious...The problem is: how to love...How to feel a persistent affectionate interest in people?...Not easy to answer.

And even after *Eyeless in Gaza* Huxley published an essay on the symbol of peace ("The Olive Tree", *The Olive Tree*) which contains this sentence: "All that was greasy possessed for the Jews a profound religious, social and sensuous significance." That is hardly the expression of a charitable, non-attached man, though no doubt Huxley's only real attachment here is the irresistible, but rather dangerous one to the clever sentence.

So it may have been partly Huxley's own difficulties in becoming un-separate and loving that impressed upon him the need for the strongest persuasion to goodness, and the strongest persuasion he could conceive of was a cosmological one. "Charity," he writes, "cannot progress towards universality unless the prevailing cosmology is either monotheistic or pantheistic—unless there is a general belief that all men are 'the sons of God'. [We cannot love each other as brothers unless we consider ourselves brothers by an important sire]." In a book that tries to formulate a practical ethics for intelligent people,<sup>2</sup> such a statement is dangerous for two reasons: (1) Not all of us can see the logical necessity of such a cosmology to such an ethics. (2) The cosmology itself is laid open to the suspicion that it has been wishfully conceived

<sup>2</sup>And it is to them that Huxley, whether he will or no, is making his appeal. His "religion" is a highly intellectualized and de-emotionalized one that can never successfully pass directly to the unintelligent or even to the untrained. That is why it must be intellectually examinable.

and may, therefore, be partially invalid. We shall return to that suspicion in our examination of the foundations on which Huxley built his cosmology.

Some of us can hardly see the necessity of such a cosmology, or any cosmology, to such ethics since there have always been a few truly charitable agnostics in the world, as well as a few charitable pantheists, Christians, and Mohammedans. Moreover, we could not all accept the cosmology even if we were convinced of its pragmatic value to ethics which we could accept wholeheartedly.

It may be that our knowledge and intelligence are not sufficient to formulate logically and deliberately an ethics that every one could take to heart and mind. But when and if such a system of ethics is formulated, some of us—unless there is some new and most wonderful revelation which appeals to us beyond any doubting—are still going to insist upon its being acceptable for its own sake and not for that of any cosmology with which it may be correlated. Until we can, not wishfully, but rather against skeptical resistance, be converted to a "new" cosmology, our ethics, if it is to be correlated with anything, must remain correlated with our own free man's agnosticism. And the nearest we can come to a sense of universal brotherhood is to that which comes of "life lived". We are brothers, if at all, because we are experiencing life contemporaneously and in the same form, but it takes the artist to make us aware even of that apparent kinship, and not everyone has the imagination to understand and assimilate an artistic expression.

#### IV

*Awareness*, not only of what goes on about us, but a sort of mystical awareness of what lies beyond our immediate sensual experience, is one of Huxley's most important ends as well as a good means. As we have seen, awareness or insight is the end to achieve which man must be good, and it is a "means whereby" he can become non-attached.

Since each man's few years of existence on earth as a human being may well be his only chance of being consciously aware of anything much beyond his own physiological needs—his only chance to be curious and explore with his imagination and intellect not only what he senses but what he wonders about—Huxley feels that not only should the individual make every effort to be aware

to the extent of his capacity, but that men should work together to give as many as possible the best opportunities to be aware. They should remove all the distractions they can—all the opportunities to become attached to one thing or another and so only partially aware. That is an end to which every sensitive, wondering human being must agree, whether his own perception may run in just the direction Huxley indicates, or not.

## V

Huxley felt that he should change his old philosophy of meaninglessness, we know, to one that would bear the good fruits of an improved ethics. He wanted his new philosophy, moreover, to have a sound and convincing basis, so he chose for his supports the evidence of our modern authority—science—and of the ancient authority, the mystical experience.<sup>1</sup>

How he makes use of science we shall see later. As a matter of fact, he makes the effort to put much of the mystical experience into terms of this contemporarily accepted authority, comparing, for instance, the training of the mystic with that of the scientist. (See *Ends and Means*, p. 342)

Huxley is convinced that the mystical experience not only can, but frequently must, be trained for. He emphasizes also the important part the will plays in having a mystical experience and the choice one can make of being or not being aware.

The sub-personal existence can be terminated at will. Anybody who so desires and knows how. . . can pass. . . to a super-personal level. This super-personal level is reached only during the mystical experience. (*Ends and Means*, p. 376.)<sup>2</sup>

What persuaded Huxley to this "pragmatic" point of view? For

<sup>1</sup>As Huxley pointed out in his essay on propaganda in *The Olive Tree*, every age has at least one accepted authority. Ours, evidently, is science and empiricism. Now, in a sense, mysticism is simply the epitome of empiricism—the mystical experience is certainly much more a personal experiment than a deduction—and it is on the personal mystical experience of himself and others and on the latest scientific investigation that Huxley has based his cosmology. Fortunately, as he sees it, they complement each other and together form the authority for the most logical end to good means. "Scientific investigation" [he writes, *Ends and Means*, p. 348] "has shown that the world is a diversity underlain by an identity of physical substance; the mystical experience testifies to the existence of a spiritual unity underlying the diversity of separate consciousness."

<sup>2</sup>See also quotation on p. 64.

one thing, of course, it was necessary to his plan of reform. The Church and certain philosophers, moreover, would have supported him in it. But in particular, it was probably the influence of the man on whom he modeled Dr. Miller in *Eyeless in Gaza* that persuaded Huxley that he could "consciously control" his philosophy even, perhaps, to the point of directing his immediate perceptions towards the most propitious truth.

## VI

There is not much doubt that for the majority of its American readers the character of Dr. Miller has seriously cheapened *Eyeless in Gaza*. We are either suspicious of him or we despise the man outright—he is too exaggerated in both ideas and manner. At worst, however, we have probably considered him an unfortunate spokesman for some of Huxley's less convincing ideas, rather than a character based directly on a man who not only holds many of those ideas himself but may have been largely responsible for them in Huxley. Huxley, as a matter of fact, effectively, if not deliberately, throws us off the scent by making Dr. Miller an admitted disciple of his model, F. M. Alexander.

F. Matthias Alexander was, apparently, an intelligent young man who applied himself even in his youth, won scholarships, taught school, was in the army, etc. He turned to reciting, finally, as a calling, until he was afflicted with a serious throat ailment which he eventually cured by his own methods. Naturally he was enthusiastic, and from those methods he evolved a system of physical education and treatment for the sick which not only some schools but certain doctors in England have sponsored. This system seems to have as its chief end a good general co-ordination, to be attained by means which, according to both teacher and pupils, cannot be understood by the uninitiate or practised without the aid of a "teacher".

Alexander has, apparently, a considerable practice in which he is successful. Indeed, no one, I think, would deny the benefits—both physical and psychological—to be derived from improved bodily co-ordination. And since Huxley recommends him from "personal experience" he must feel that he responded favorably to

Alexander's treatment. To men like Huxley, moreover, Alexander offers more than physical improvement; he offers intriguing ideas and theories, as well.

In *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* and *The Use of Self*, Alexander has presented, among others, some very good ideas. They strike one as intelligent and sound and are not, of course, entirely original with him. Huxley must have found them variously expressed in a number of his other sources, so that one wonders all the more why in *Eyeless in Gaza* he put the expression and championship of these ideas back into the mouth of a character who must have been modeled on Alexander—Dr. Miller. And one asks, too, what sort of mistaken honesty compelled him to take so much of the cheap along with the valuable from this particular source.

Many of Alexander's theories run in the same direction as Huxley's own wishful thinking—that man can do more and more for himself even to directing the course of his evolution.\* And Alexander presents one general theory that was particularly bound to appeal to Huxley.\* Man, he points out, cannot be separated into mind and body; mind and body are too interdependent. And right now man is in a bad way "psycho-physically" because he has evolved too rapidly for himself and is at an uncomfortable stage where he cannot trust his "subconscious control" and does not know how to assume full "conscious control". The remedy is not to turn back to more primitive conditions to improve his co-ordination, but to use his intelligence and "consciously control" his co-ordination under his immediate environment. That general theory, has of course, several correlated ones, as well as any number of practical suggestions accompanying it—a whole system of practice, in fact, as we have seen.

\*See *Ends and Means*. p. 258.

\*\*"The suggested adoption of conscious guidance and control as a universal principle on the lines heretofore outlined will enable us to move slowly, but with gradually increasing speed towards those higher psycho-physical spheres which will separate the animal and human kingdoms by a deep gulf, and mankind will then enjoy the blessings which will be the natural result of capacities fully developed." (*Man's Supreme Inheritance*, p. 192. See also pp. 4-5.)

\*As well as, incidentally, to John Dewey, who has written prefaces to Alexander's books.

\*See ch. 2 of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* on "Comparison of Evolutionary Processes in the Savage and Civilized States".

Alexander claims that not only physical improvement can be gained by his methods, but also mental, moral and eventually social. In fact, "there is no sphere of human activity, of human feeling or philosophy where the adoption of the principles of conscious guidance and control would not bring invaluable benefits." And Huxley, too, seems persuaded that this is so.

Since the whole purpose of this article is not to establish the identity of Dr. Miller and disclose one of the more unfortunate sources of Huxley's ideology, it would only over-emphasize the importance of Alexander to give all the evidence here. Anyone who cares to look into Alexander's books will find it conspicuous on their pages; and, for the more trusting, perhaps an example or two will suffice, not only to establish Alexander as an important source but also to show traces of that unsoundness and exaggeration which we distrusted in Dr. Miller and which Alexander carries to the usual epitome of quackery—a painless cure for cancer.\*

Alexander, because he is describing such "new" sensations, finds it necessary to construct a rather particular, but well re-iterated jargon of his own. This consists not so much of single words as of phrases such as "the proper mental attitude", "the position of mechanical advantage", "sensory appreciation", "conscious inhibition", "re-education", "end gaining", "means whereby", etc. Huxley has added some of these catch-phrases to his own vocabulary where they stand rather out of place among his other sufficient and well chosen words.

Huxley gives a concise summary of the better part of Alexander's ideas in Anthony's diary for June 3, 1934,\* and several page-references could be made to Alexander's books for nearly every line of the entry. Some of his vocabulary is here as well as indications of a number of ideas that Huxley pursues in *End and Means*. So a rather full quotation from that entry seems justified.

At today's lesson with Miller<sup>\*\*</sup> found myself suddenly a step forward in my grasp of the theory and practice of the technique. To learn proper use one must first inhibit all improper uses of the self [“the correct order of procedure for teacher

\*See *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, pp. 47, 86, 183, and 288.

\*\*Eyeless in Gaza, pp. 248-250. There is also a summary and exposition of Alexander's ideas in *Ends and Means*, pp. 254-259.

\*\*This passage identifies Miller with Alexander as finally as any character can be identified with his model.

and pupil is first for the pupil to learn to prevent himself from doing the wrong things," *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, p. 210]. Refuse to be hurried into gaining ends by the equivalent (in personal, psychological terms) of violent revolution [the violent revolution that no end can justify, in *Ends and Means*]; inhibit this tendency, concentrate on the means whereby the end is to be achieved; then act ["It is not the 'end' that the teacher and pupil must work for, but the 'means whereby,'" *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, p. 230]. This process entails knowing good and bad use—knowing them apart. By the "feel" ["Sensory appreciation"—". . . when a person sits down or stands up in accordance with the demands of constructive conscious control, the process involves an adequate and continuous state of increasing awareness in regard to the use of the mechanisms, so that immediately there is a wrong use of these mechanisms, the person concerned becomes aware of it, and at once substitutes a satisfactory for the unsatisfactory use," *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 306]. Increased awareness and the increased power of control result. [Awareness—Alexander, we see, uses the word in this sense, too, and then on a different level in *Ends and Means* it becomes at once a very important end and a means—one of the major virtues, in fact. But awareness on this first level, as well as a hint of its continuation on other levels to the final one of mysticism, Huxley first learns from Alexander, as Anthony does from Dr. Miller]. . . . Here. . . . one is taught how to become aware. And not only that. Also how to perform rightly, instead of wrongly, the activities of which there is awareness. [Alexander teaches people how to sit, walk, talk, etc., just as Dr. Miller teaches Anthony.] Nor is this all. Awareness and power of control are transferable. Skill acquired in getting to know the muscular aspect of mind-body can be carried over into the exploration of other aspects. ["It ('conscious control') is not used merely to indicate a guidance and control which we may apply in the activities of life with but doubtful precision in one or two directions only, but one which may be applied universally, and with precision in all directions, and in all spheres where the mental and physical manifestations of mankind are concerned," *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, p. 57.]

On the fifth of April, Dr. Miller, having given Anthony a lesson in the "use of the self", explained that he would find it a "technique for translating good intentions into acts, for being sure of doing what one knows one ought to do." Huxley has always had a certain moral streak in him; he has wanted to be good, but not

until recently has he been at all sure just what "good" and "bad" were, if they existed as such. In *Eyeless in Gaza* and *Ends and Means*, however, he seems to have few doubts on that score. He lays all the emphasis on being able to do what one knows one should do.<sup>11</sup> And Alexander-Miller, we see, can teach him how to do that, along with how to stand up, sit down, and bend over. So Anthony notes in his diary for June 3rd<sup>12</sup> that the "power to cure bad behavior seems essentially similar to the power to cure bad co-ordination. One learns this last when learning the proper use of self."

Huxley uses the Alexander system to help carry out his reform on two levels. On the first he directly suggests the use of Alexander's methods to improve the conduct of the individual, and, as many individuals in the aggregate, society. In his chapter on education in *Ends and Means* he recommends both Alexander's books and his system of physical education for our children. In his chapter on ethics he writes,<sup>13</sup>

... I have described a technique of physical training (that developed by F. M. Alexander), which is valuable, among other reasons, as a means for increasing conscious control of the body and, in this way, raising a human being from a condition of physical unawareness to a state of physical self-consciousness and self-control. Such physical self-awareness and self-control leads to, and to some extent is actually a form of, mental and moral self-awareness and self-control.

We have seen how important *awareness* is to Huxley's cosmology and ethics. *Self-control* is almost equally important. It would undoubtedly be, for one thing, an essential part of the training for the mystical experience. In the second place, that people can control themselves is a necessary primary assumption in any plan for social reform. Especially a plan that aims at a more reasonable and tolerant behavior which is to help forestall such disasters as war. If Alexander's methods were successful in producing that

<sup>11</sup>"The staggering imbecility of old Socrates! . . . imagining that one had only to know the correct line of conduct in order to follow it! One practically always knows it—and more often than not one doesn't follow it." (*Eyeless in Gaza*, pp. 277.)

<sup>12</sup>*Eyeless in Gaza*, pp. 250.

<sup>13</sup>*Ends and Means*, p. 377.

sort of self-control they would be worthy of greatest consideration and respect.

But apparently his methods do not produce such results even in their originator. During the war of 1914-18, Alexander was no more able than the rest of the world to keep his intellectual balance. In the 1918 edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, the book which introduces his system for achieving self-control, he includes a most amazing and mad chapter on "Evolutionary Standards and Their Influence in the Crisis of 1914" which proffers a theory of the comparatively low state of evolution among the Germans and contains such statements as this:

Therefore, a test as to the ratio of progress of nations on the evolutionary plane is to be found in their tendency and desire to advance beyond that stage where the mental and physical forces, which should only belong as inherited instincts to the brute animals and savages, hold sway; and with this in view, if we take a survey of the history, ideals, habits of life, mental outlook, and general tendencies of the German nation, it will show conclusively that these self-hypnotised people approximated too closely to the lower animals and savages in their mode and chief aims of life.

It seems no less than ironical that Huxley should advise methods which produce such results, in a book the purpose of which is to produce such opposite ones.

On the second level, the approach is less direct. Here the Alexander system helps Huxley to formulate a philosophy to be used as a basis of reform. It helps him by getting him into shape to have the mystical experience that he uses as such a strong argument for his cosmology, and it may help him in other ways to have the right mystical experience.

We have seen that Huxley has been persuaded that good behavior and awareness come as natural outgrowths of good co-ordination and sensory appreciation and that the same technique can be applied to controlling one's points of view and moral actions, and one's elimination. One acquires virtue if not along with, at least in much the same way that one acquires a good posture. And "virtue is the essential preliminary to the mystical experience." (*Ends and Means*, p. 347.)

That virtue is a prerequisite to the mystical experience might

seem open to question. It did not seem to be a preliminary to the apostle Paul's mystical experience. But Huxley not only makes that assumption, he insists upon it.

Another important means to the mystical experience is the practice of meditation. Meditation Huxley calls, in fact, "the technique of mysticism" and says that "properly practiced, with due preparation, physical, mental and moral, meditation may result in. . .the direct intuition of, and union with, an ultimate spiritual reality. . ." If the technique of "conscious control" can be used in "every sphere of human activity", that must include meditation. And in *Eyeless in Gaza* (p. 12) Huxley writes that

Miller believes possible a non-theological praxis of meditation. Which he would like, of course, to couple with training, along F. M. Alexander's lines, in use of the self.

Anthony proceeds to build up in his diary, from time to time, what one might assume to be sample meditations. The whole last chapter of *Eyeless in Gaza*, in fact, might well be read as a sample meditation, built up with such self-hypnotic aids as the repetition of single words—"unity", "one, one, one", and "peace"—to the point of mystical ecstasy, the light out of which he had to let himself lapse "slowly and cautiously. . .back through the darkness into the broken gleams and shadows of everyday existence."

So we find both virtue (including awareness) and meditation, in their offices of both ends in themselves and means to the mystical experience that shall help establish our metaphysical beliefs, approached either directly or indirectly by the rather suspect Alexander way. From cancer to the mystical experience—Alexander, with Huxley's assistance, does move in rather long strides.

We have suggested that Huxley's immediate perception of the world as a unity may have come as an affirmation of what he felt the world should be if there was to be built on its nature any cosmology suitable to a good ethics. Whether or not Alexander had any influence on the direction towards which Huxley may possibly have guided his "immediate perception", it is, of course, impossible to say. But Alexander, too, wrote, long before the advent of *Eyeless in Gaza*, that one must conceive of the world as well as the human body as a unity. In the preface of *Constructive*

<sup>44</sup>*Ends and Means*, p. 332.

*Conscious Control of the Individual* (p. xi) he disparages the theories "which tend in practical application towards the separation instead of the unity of human potentialities" and says that his own thesis

provides principles which are fundamental to that condition of unity which we all agree should be inseparable from the processes of living. The subject matter of this book [he adds] represents an endeavor to show that the great problems involved in the present condition of individual and national unrest demand for their solution a recognition, not only of their unity, but also of the unity of their underlying causes.

Finally, the only conclusion which it seems possible to draw is that the use of Alexander has weakened Huxley's argument both in specific cases, as we have seen, and in general, since we find him capable of accepting an untrustworthy authority.

## VII

The other important foundation on which Huxley builds his "scientific-mystical conception of the world" is, of course, science. Here again, Huxley seems only too willing to turn from the tentative to the implication, at any rate, of the positive, and he is, furthermore, inclined to speak of one thing in terms of another. Contemporary science seems to admit quite frankly that its discoveries are for the most part tentative, and Huxley hardly claims that they do more than indicate. But he uses the orator's neat trick of frankly admitting the weakness of his primary assumptions and then proceeding, nevertheless, to use them as a working basis.

He introduces every branch of science to make his points, though his main argument is based on biology and physics. He argues, in substance, that as far as they go they support his mystical idea of nature and when they do not support it, either they do not go far enough <sup>16</sup> or those who argue from the scientific point of view and

<sup>16</sup>"No account of the scientific picture of the world and its history would be complete unless it contained a reminder of the fact frequently forgotten by scientists themselves, that the picture does not even claim to be comprehensive." (*Ends and Means*, p. 308.)

who do not find at least meaning in the world, are prejudiced by their own selfish desires.<sup>19</sup>

The biological sciences offer Huxley proof that pragmatically, at any rate, it is better to be "good" than separate and evil.

Biological specialization may be regarded as a tendency on the part of a species to insist on its separateness; and the result of specialization . . . is either negatively disastrous, in the sense that it precludes the possibility of further biological progress, or positively disastrous in the sense that it leads to the extinction of the species. In the same way intra-specific competition may be regarded as the expression of a tendency on the part of related individuals to insist on their separateness and independence; the effects of intra-specific competition are . . . almost wholly bad. Conversely, the qualities which have led to biological progress are the qualities which make it possible for individual beings to escape from their separateness—intelligence and the tendency to co-operate. Love and understanding are valuable even on the biological level. Hatred, unawareness, stupidity and all that makes for increase of separateness . . . have led either to the extinction of a species, or to its becoming a living fossil, incapable of making further biological progress. (*Ends and Means*, p. 350.)

A large grain of obvious truth lies in that paragraph, but isn't Huxley unjustifiably speaking at once in terms of both biological functioning and social relations?

And he has, of course, overlooked several facts of biology, such as the one that co-operation among animals often leads to specialization—intense and weakening specialization, at that, such as you find among bees. The drone bee, for example, has specialized in being nothing but a male to the extent that he is useless for any purpose but reproduction and very few drones ever perform even that function. Professor J. H. Bradley points out this disadvantage in co-operation in his excellent article, "Co-operation in Nature" in the *Yale Review*, (Summer 1938)—an article which Huxley would do well to read. In it Professor Bradley concludes that

<sup>19</sup>"Those who detect no meaning in the world generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits their books that the world should be meaningless." (*Ends and Means*, p. 312.) Any philosopher who has that attitude "is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way that they find most advantageous to themselves." (*Ends and Means*, p. 315.)

co-operation probably has more advantages for the "lower" animals than non-co-operation, but he writes also that "as a matter of observable fact, co-operation is not invariably perfect as a way of life because nature is not invariably perfect as an economist."

"Love and understanding," Huxley states, "are valuable even on the biological level." Well, perhaps, though not in quite the anthropomorphic sense which he implies, but it is probably even more true that all life depends on the destruction of other life. Any individual, in order to exist, must be separate and destructive for the very "condition of life is separation".

"But separation is evil." Why the very real condition of separation is evil while underlying unity is good, even Huxley does not attempt to explain. He doesn't seem to consider an explanation necessary. He admits—he points out—that separation is a condition of our very existence and that there is no way to get around the fact, but he never seems to consider that in the natural order of things the "condition" may be no more evil than the "essential", or underlying, nature.

In his "scientific-mystical" cosmology, Huxley has been able to make most use of the investigation of the physical sciences into the nature of matter.

Scientific investigation reveals, [he finds], (and these findings. . . are confirmed by the direct intuition of the trained mystic and contemplative) that concrete reality consists of a totality and that independent existents are merely abstractions from the reality. (*Ends and Means*, p. 295).

All matter, according to the physicist, is built up, in a limited number of patterns, out of units of energy which, in isolation, seem to possess none of the qualities ordinarily associated with matter in the mass. [In other words], the material universe is pictured by science as composed of a diversity of patterns of a single substance. (*Ends and Means*, p. 292-3.)

Huxley felt he had the verdict of science to support him, then, in his meditations on essential unity and conditional separateness.

What Thomas Huxley would have thought of all this one hesitates to imagine, but it does not take much scientific training to discover that here Aldous has lapsed from straight-forward thinking. It is possible that eventually a new religion may grow up based on both mystical perception and the discoveries of modern science—a pantheism, perhaps, of which the apologies will be made in

laboratories. And from that religion may spring a powerful ethics of forbearance and brotherly love, but that ethics would seem more apt to come as a natural outgrowth of a greater "scientific" understanding of human nature and of a rebirth of awareness of existence as a whole, than as based on an intellectual analogy with the sub-atomic structure of matter. Especially if the analogy is no more sound than Huxley's.

Moreover, while Huxley might simply have used the implications of scientific research cautiously to help substantiate his mystical concept of the universe, or even as a symbol for a way of life, instead he insists upon them as supporting his ethics not only indirectly, as evidence for his cosmology, but directly, as factual reality that defines the directions of moral good and evil.

It hardly seems too facetious even to point out here that not many people are going to love their neighbors because they know that electrons and protons are both electric in nature, any more than they will continue to fight their neighbors merely because they know also that electrons and protons not only attract, but repel each other.

Huxley's analogy, in other words, is a poor if not absolutely false one, and even though it were excellent the fact would still remain that not many people have ever guided their actions by such remote considerations. A few have always been charitable because they believed in charity as an ideal or because of their natural temperament. Others have been good because they believed in some concept which touched them directly, such as heaven or hell. And probably even more have been decent in their relations with their fellow-beings because they realized, at least half-consciously, the mutual benefit to be derived from good behavior. Any intellectual or imaginative concept must be convincing first of all to concern people at all, and to concern most people it must have something to do with their "conditional" existence.

## VIII

Huxley's structure, then, does not stand up any too well under close examination. Its weakness lies perhaps chiefly in method, and that may be due largely to the fact that he learned too much of his method at the feet of F. M. Alexander, who is not wholly trust-

worthy. Huxley's system of ethics is not inevitably, nor always well, correlated with his cosmology and his two most important arguments for that cosmology have suffered in handling. Science, he interprets too freely, too anthropomorphically, and not very scientifically; and his own mystical experience he manages to present, at least, as tainted with pragmatism.

Huxley might simply have offered for our consideration an ethics for its own sake—an ethics that would have been both the end and the means. Or he might have shown how a greater spiritual awareness might help us to be less concerned with our own immediate interests and therefore more tolerant, charitable people to live together. Instead, he has based his ethics on a cosmology which he uses also as both an analogy and a reason for good behavior, and which, as he presents it, does not seem very sound.

His suggestion of the possibility of other, more ultimate ends than the merely pragmatic is good—it lies, on the whole, in the direction of complete open-mindedness, and it recalls our attention to certain points of view which we are all too inclined to neglect. That is why it is so unfortunate that the particular cosmological end which he finally lays before us fails to stand up firmly under our examination.

We must, of course, consider *Eyeless in Gaza* and *Ends and Means* as presenting a tentative and incomplete ideology. Huxley may well be started in the right direction, but if he is not to shake our faith in his intellectual integrity to the point where he can no longer render us that service which has depended upon that faith, he must be more wary of convictions that tend to interfere with his objectivity and of teachers with intriguing theories and magnetic personalities. He must, that is, preserve his open-mindedness and maintain his disinterested approach.

by Charles T. Harrison

## THE VERSE OF LAWRENCE LEE

Lawrence Lee's verse is more meticulous than abundant. Except for a few privately printed poems, his published verse is contained in two volumes: *Summer Goes On* and *Monticello and Other Poems*<sup>1</sup>. It is verse which, in its consistently finished texture, in its fairly limited range, in the persistence of its lyrism, in the grace of its pastoral images, suggests comparison with that of the seventeenth century sons of Jonson.

It is strikingly free from affectation or exhibitionism. Its subjects are not determined by the exigences of Marxism or agrarianism, or by an obligation to any school of metaphysics or ethics. Rather, it concerns itself with the traditional themes of lyrical poetry—love, death, and the poignances of human and external nature. Lee owes more to Herrick than to Donne, more to Keats than to Rimbaud.

Despite his freedom from the dictates of poetic fashion, however, he is sensitively a contemporary poet,—as no reader of the more recent volume, especially, would fail to perceive. For the two volumes taken together demonstrate at once the sustained quality of his lyrism and the emergence of a direction in his writing. The earlier poems, many of them attaining a grace of execution worthy of Herrick, are the utterances of youth. Such lyrism is not necessarily subject to modification with the poet's increasing maturity, as witness the work of Herrick himself and that of A. E. Housman. Lee's verse has not lost its ability to sing, but it begins to give evidence that its summer is not eternal. Something of Thomas Hardy's perception of meaning in the commonplace, something of Emily Dickinson's penetration through the commonplace, have intervened. There is a new condensation, a new regard for meaning.

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<sup>1</sup>Scribner's 1933 and 1937.

## II

Lawrence Lee is a scrupulous metrist. Except for one experiment in narrative blank verse, obviously influenced by Robert Frost, he has confined himself to rimed lyrical stanzas. Within this limit, he uses an unusual variety of forms; and, with very rare exceptions, he uses them with assurance. The total effect of his work is determined by the freedom he has attained within stanzas which are almost epigrammatic in their technical restraint.

The different three-line stanzas may be taken as illustration. "Bequest to My Daughters" is a youthful expression of satisfaction with the physical goods of existence; its brief and rapid run-on lines convey in their movement as well as in their imagery the delight of active bodily perfection. These are the first few stanzas:

Though it grieve you  
This is all that  
I shall leave you:  
  
White and slender  
Buoyant bodies,  
Which shall gender  
  
Love and wonder—  
Beauty newer  
Than leaves under  
  
April's flashing  
Silver rainfalls  
And their splashing.

There are a dozen or more lyrics in the three-line stanza, and each has its distinct scheme. In every instance the variation is so nicely fitted to its purpose that the formal virtuosity might well be overlooked. "The Strange Country" employs an unrimed first line, and a short second line rimed with a long third one. The result is a measure which has as musical a spontaneity as that of "Bequest to My Daughters", but of a diametrically opposed kind; each stanza is a unit, slowing up to a meditative pause. Hence, in part, the attainment of a faery quality which seems to hover on the border of symbolism.

This is strange country  
And no tree  
Blows memory down on me.  
  
Burns as a lion  
This yellow sun.  
Yet warms not blood nor bone. . .

Many of Lawrence Lee's recent poems have this nimbus of suggestiveness, but their images are concrete in both form and value. A careful reading of "The Escape", for instance, will show that its effect is due to the tangibility of emotion which is consecrated in the memory of a particular experience, rather than to a diffusion of emotion into the abstract or general. Here, the meter is a sustained pentameter:

Into strange night the frozen journey lay,  
With spirits cold and shaken by the gale,  
Through turnings half unknown we groped a way.

"Night Journey" constitutes a departure from Lee's more accustomed modes. It is narrative, and illustrates better perhaps than any other poem his effort to grasp and to convey the poignance of vulgar experience. Its three-line stanza is in rhythm, colloquial in diction:

Two girls came running, with a click  
Of heels. In the strong light  
Both blinked and one looked scared and sick.

The most prominent lyrical form in Lawrence Lee's work is the sonnet, in its technical demands remote from the comparatively fragile three-line stanza. The range between the two forms is Lee's range. Although it is usually the condensation of the sonnet which is emphasized in analyses of its genius, one might argue with fair validity that an equal difficulty lies in its extension. The lyrical poet need feel no restraint at being confined to fourteen lines; sustaining a stanza through fourteen lines may present a more serious issue. Hence the many sonnets which peter out to an anticlimactic ending.

The chief excellence of Lee's sonnets is that they are as coherent and firm as his shorter stanzas. They have considerable variety in the minor details of form, but—with one exception—eschew experiment. The single exception is an attractive one: "The Hour for Lamps". Here the scheme is four-three-four-three, with the resultant achievement of a carefully executed balance between related parts of the poem.

Generally, Lee has used the sonnet for reflective writing. Even in the earlier volume, his soberer musings—elegiac and semi-elegiac pieces, or poems essaying a generalization on the basis of a particular experience—tend to take this form. An examination

of the ideas of his poetry will depend heavily on the four short sonnet sequences—"The Letters," "Tomorrow Goodbye", "Twenty-four Hours", "The Minute"—and on the individual sonnets.

There are other long-stanza forms which are closely related to the sonnet in technical demand and aesthetic tone. "Evening Cinema" is a twelve-line poem which, with controlled sympathy, conveys the pathos of contrast between tawdry dream and bleak actuality. With the intellectualization of emotion, the images become less specific but more metaphysical than usual:

Here are the meadows where we may forget.  
Wake not the faces lifted to a dream,  
For of the world we bear some likeness yet.  
Shadow beside shadows, let the heart take root,  
The fallow mind send up its tendril wish,  
The body be of air from head to foot.  
The passing to Elysium is swift.  
For two starred hours the lotus holds the soul;  
Then, in the light, the soft illusions lift  
And with some look of dream still in their eyes  
The wakers stand upon real streets and see  
Toward what dark rooms the homeward turning lies.

### III

Lawrence Lee is a Southern poet. He was born in Alabama and lives in Virginia. These two regions are inevitably written into his verse. He writes of the South not as if there were no world beyond the Potomac and not as if he were challenging the world beyond. His poetry insinuates no scheme for the South's salvation. But he loves the "gullies and red dust" of his native state; and he is haunted by the singing hills about Charlottesville.

No other poet has conveyed the deep South, in its color and its odor, so adequately as Lee has.

It is a country given to the sun  
And to the patient workers in the sun.  
Beyond the cities is a house or two,  
Scattered and drawn apart to watch the road,  
And a slow wagon rumbling off to town,  
With a low haze of dust where it has passed.  
A single worker watches from the fields  
With thoughts of Saturday.

It is a country of rivers slowly flowing through the heat; of buzzards circling low on great wings; of yellow rattlesnakes, of black bass, of brilliant creatures that flit and turn. There is sound of

water running secretly through woods, of a lone cowbell tinkling in a field.

It is not a purely idyllic country. "Ignorance walks its back-roads, letting blood". But it is to the Southern meadows that the poet entices Joanna, to see their "miracles of blossoming". And he feels a pressing hunger to be at home when he sees lines of wild ducks pointing.

The love for Charlottesville and its ring of hills is less physical. Here it is in part the memory of "greatness gone", and the sense that the "excellent dead" may "sometimes send their love back from the grave". And yet there is no single poem in which Lee has more memorably fixed the very essence of a region than "Apple Country":

It was an apple night: enough of cold  
To keep the fruit compact and sharply sweet.  
The gusty wind brought scents of apple mould  
Out of the mountains in the dark and beat  
Some last dry leaves against the station door.  
There was an hour yet—and cold to wait,  
And walk, and stamp about the draughty floor.  
The only train for home tonight was late.  
Lights went out in a farmhouse on the hill.  
All of the apple country seemed asleep  
And a cold moon held every shadow still  
That had a leafless orchard tree to keep.

#### IV

The current poet without a program for democracy is challenging obscurity; he invites classification as pallid aesthete or sentimental escapist. But what if he doesn't know precisely how society can or should save itself? He may even feel that unrealism can hardly go further than that of the precious literary group whose members proclaim schemes and denunciations, political and economic, for mutual gratulation. It is, surely, sentimental to deny or to ignore the real circumstances of contemporary existence. But it is only a proper humility to acknowledge that one has no prescription for the ills of the world; and it is proper confidence to observe and to record what meanings one can find in one's own experience. If one's experience is of a universally accessible sort, the value is so much the greater.

The title poems of *Monticello* are important in setting the context of the collection. All that the builder of Monticello loved is

water running secretly through woods, of a lone cowbell tinkling alone, although a world seemed ending". At a time when "man's uncertain mind" is "driven as the smoke", the poet will do well to seize on the goods provided by the "space and time which hold his love"; and this is no facile cyrenaicism.

Love of a native state or of an immediate physical environment is, of course, such a good. But this love need not be an escape. "There are no escapes. Flight does not leave the noisy heart behind. The world is with us still in our own shapes". A more important, because more human and more universal, good lies in the simple relations of human beings with each other and with the objects of common experience.

Lawrence Lee's most extended poems are narratives which undertake to illuminate these relations. They are his least successful compositions. He is by temper so purely a lyrical poet that "Summer Goes On" and "Night Journey" glow chiefly in their lyrical interludes. The first is a pastoral idyl, laid in a clearly realized Southern setting. "Night Journey" recounts the adventure of two men with the girl hitch-hikers whom they pick up on the road to Baltimore. Again the setting is vivid, and the conclusion—with its revelation of beauty and passion—is moving.

But these poems are of interest chiefly as essays toward the lyrics which say compactly what Lee now has to say, the lyrics which are his maturist verse. "A Time of Darkness" etches the figures of tired plowman and tired horse against the obscurity of late light and dark mind. "The Country People" and "The Student Nurses" are poems of human charity. "Elegy in Brief" acknowledges the peace and the support which a single courageous spirit may provide for numerous confused spirits.

Thought and feeling which are so significant as to transcend change may be attached by the mind to "the little intimate things" of daily existence. The heart creates symbols and requires them: "the rug that lies along my wooden floor"; the challenging crow of a cock at midnight; "the conch cast shoreward from the seas"; "a hand that sets out forks and plates" . . . "Splendor descends on common things".

There is an image in one of Lawrence Lee's poems which may be said to illustrate this whole group of lyrics: men penetrate "the tangled branches of a wood" to come upon an ancient house

and "see what great simplicity had done". The poet believes that the *vision*—in open light—is beneficent. In "The Statue", "The Sparow", "The Pigeon", "The Hour for Lamps", there are variations of the motive: commonplace objects, simple experiences, are the materials from which the pattern of existence deduces both its ethics and its aethetics. A modest jug is adequate symbol to the sensitive and contemplative mind.

The beauty we have known  
Need not be cut in stone.  
The ordinary day  
Yields a sufficient clay  
For such a humble shape.

There will be heat, to keep  
Earth color and a glaze,  
In fire of blame or praise.  
And no one know, if spilled,  
The liquor that it held.

*by L. Robert Lind*

### ARNOLD OF BRESCIA

(1155 A. D.)

My need, too great for silence or vain speech,  
Drives to that unavoidable bright sword  
Whose edge cuts clear the flesh no mortal leech  
Could cleanse, while recreant body played the lord.  
Out of the mind where stirs the brand of thought  
Shall leap the hissing cautery of death;  
The heart, exultant and in glory caught,  
Beats to the imminent clamor in the breath.

This daily cowardice of little lies  
And men grown timid in the sight of men  
Brings to the stake the headlong and unwise,  
The brave too brave to look on it again.  
What use the sacrifice but God can know:  
So explicit, dear comrades, and I go.

by R. L. Morris

## CAN POETRY BE TAUGHT?

"If a man sets out sincerely to teach poetry, he will teach either history or grammar. There is no such thing as the teaching of poetry."

With this declaration a wise scholar once demolished my faith in the professors of poetry. Since these words were spoken many books have appeared under beguiling titles, ranging from *ABC's of Poetry* to *What Poetry Can Do for You* and *The XYZ of Verse*. I believe I have examined my share of these volumes "with a view to adoption for class use", as publishers obligingly remind, and plead guilty to having "adopted" a few. Now I confess, not as one hardened by experience, but of sufficient experience to utter, that the mass of these works does nothing more than confirm the wisdom of my ancient preceptor. In short, they raise the familiar question: How, if it must be a course of instruction in colleges and schools, can poetry be taught?

Two books published in the last decade<sup>1</sup> seem to throw a certain light on this question so precious to the pedagogues of poetry and every would-be pedagogue of the same. Many of the recent studies of poetry designed for young readers either drop them into the vortex of the critical whirlpool, or take a superficial view of poetry, called *appreciation*. In the first case students quit the study even more mystified than when they came to it; in the second their probable contempt for the matter was only intensified. The two volumes under review seem to polarize the present poetic situation; they apparently focus the contemporary tendencies in most efforts to teach the poetic art.

That the books in question cover different material, and that their moods and immediate objectives are dissimilar, is freely admitted, but a minor objection, for their ultimate aim is identical;

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<sup>1</sup>Louise Dudley, *The Study of Literature*, Houghton-Mifflin, 1928. Cleanth Brooks, Jr. and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry, an Anthology for College Students*, Henry Holt and Company, 1938.

to inculcate in the student a justifiable accounting for his literary preferences. As Miss Dudley expresses the purposes of her book, "The first is knowledge and understanding of the great classics. The second is knowledge of the standards of literature, or better, the ability to give an intelligent account of one's literary likes and dislikes". Professors Brooks and Warren "hope to present to the student, in proper context and after proper preparation, some of the basic problems—with the aim of not making technical critics, but merely of making competent readers of poetry". In approaching these ideals the authors of the two books use devices indicating the scope and depth of our present attitudes toward poetry.

But why consider the topic seriously? In this practical sphere where all must "count" practically, what good is poetry if it has no "efficiency value"? The subject can always be defended on the ground that it is pastime reading, like the picture pages. As a way to waste time it is excusable. But as a standard course of the liberal curriculum, how to defend it there? Matthew Arnold's description of it as "at bottom a criticism of life" was honorable defense for a full generation. But poetry as practical morality has little meaning to an unmoral age. Then there are those who find refuge in teaching grammar and history in the name of poetry. But our concern is with poetry itself and the hope of teaching it.

Repeatedly are we advised that the modern temper is in no way disposed to poetry. How can a tissue of lies (poetry) provide a public with efficient responses to a practical environment? How can the approximate statements of poetry be taken seriously in the light of exact information? Poetry, which poets themselves admit is an evasion, is a poor or no substitute for reality. Others, even scientists, admit that in poetry there is ordered emotional energy that might be of value in effecting the good life here below, but they have little hope for any such consummation. So they tolerate it as a body of pseudo-statements valuable to the deposed folk imagination in a day when the certified statement reigns alone.

One feels that it was such a tissue of thought that inspired the author of *The Study of Literature*. Published ten years ago when the science messiah was more worshipped, if anything, than today, the book is both an apology for poetry and an excuse. Miss Dudley reveals in her preface that for her theory of literature she was especially indebted to Benedetto Croce. The book is infused with

an evident expressionism which puts the reader in a frame of mind to agree with all points expressed, but a doubt remains regarding one's "understanding and knowledge of the great classics". Miss Dudley renders an ingenious distinction between intuition and logical knowledge. "Many of Shelley's poems belong to this class [containing false logic]. The intuitive ideas are true though the logical statements of these ideas may be recognized as false. Poetry is intuitive knowledge, and people go to poetry for intuitive knowledge". Intuition, a term of first importance in impressionist criticism, is to Miss Dudley the chief prerequisite of a work of art. Sometimes she quotes from prose writers to prove this, but as she prefers the poets (Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Tennyson are preferred quotables) one concludes that the author has an intuition of poetry, but merely understands prose.

Miss Dudley's method of organization is simplicity itself, and her gentle vein readily persuades any reader that here is the secret way to the mystery of poetry. One reviewer observed that "Her method is conspicuously admirable. It is clear, concise, provocative, leaning upon a foundation rock of scientific authority". Chapter headings: Kinds of Knowledge; Kinds of Images; Forms of the Productive Imagination; The Emotions; Nature of Intuition; the Truth of the Idea; the Relation of the Intuition to the Externalization—to list but a few—indicate the scope of her psychological analysis. No student using *The Study of Literature* could fail to be impressed by the author's skillful attack on the adversary, poetry. She lays it open to its bare psychological bones, and triumphs. But the student is tempted to say when all is said, "What's poetry to me, or me to poetry"? It appears that the doctrines of intuition and expressionism do not go far enough. They may describe the psychological bases of poetry, but they are a vague or incomplete foundation on which to raise a handbook of criticism for students.

To Miss Dudley's unexpressed but dominant notion that poetry is an indefinite "appeal to the emotions", Professors Brooks and Warren answer, after ten years, that poetry is obliged to *say* something; it must be definite; it must come to conclusions. Contrary to Miss Dudley, who holds that art may serve as pastime, as anaesthetic, as beauty, as knowledge of life, Brooks and Warren believe that art, of which poetry is the clearest manifestation, gives

a counterpart "of the body and solid substance of the world." But their book is no tissue of phrases, praises, and promises.

In their "Letter to the Teacher" they assume that "if poetry is worth teaching at all it is worth teaching as poetry." They also wish to dispose of a "few basic misconceptions", one being that poetry is an excuse for something better, which is apparently the basic misconception of *The Study of Literature*. In direct opposition to Miss Dudley's step-by-step delineation of such items as intuition, idea, pattern, image, word, they believe that "a poem is an organic system of relationships, and the poetic quality should never be understood to inhere in one or more factors taken in isolation." They also argue against paraphrase, biographical and historical evidence, and inspiration and didactic interpretations—all of which are included in Miss Dudley's *substitutional* approach to poetry. Believing that no object is in itself poetical or non-poetical, they declare that it is the use to which a poet puts an object in his poem that determines the degree of its poetical value. Quoting Cazamian, they conclude that "much more fruitful than the problems of origins and development are those of content and significance. What is the human matter, what the artistic value of the work?"

*Understanding Poetry* follows a systematic organization, like the earlier volume, but whereas Miss Dudley attempted logical organization, the present editors essay a rational plan. The seven sections include: Narrative Poems; Implied Narrative; Objective Description; Metrics; Tone and Attitude; Imagery; Theme. These divisions are not logically exclusive; they overlap inevitably. Through the book the editors often refer to the danger of studying a poem exclusively for its metrics, or imagery, or theme, etc. To them a poem is simply organic structure. To this idea they have applied 238 poems, ranging from the old ballads to Allen Tate and Hart Crane. They follow 37 of the poems with elaborate prose criticisms, perhaps too dogmatic for impressionistic tastes.

To this objection the editors radically reply that their analyses invite disagreement. A teacher's "explanation of that disagreement should dramatize for the student the basic issues involved. And in fact, the editors feel that disagreement is to be encouraged rather than discouraged in so far as pure impressionism can be eliminated from the debate."

What Brooks and Warren are saying is an emphatic *No!* to the legion of school books of which *The Study of Literature* may be taken as one of the best—not worst—examples. Brooks and Warren would return students' attention to individual poems by concrete and inductive study. They pronounce frequent disclaimers against those who excuse poetry as passive pleasures in "fine sentiments and fine words."

It is evident to any student of contemporary poetry that the Brooks-Warren text is built on modernist theories. The editors' favored words are *dramatic, dramatize, contrast, concentration, paradox*. Theirs is an "intellectual" approach to poetry—complex, hard, clear, bright. It is a book for Professor Readywit rather than Miss Beautyseeker.

Objections to the book will be raised on just this ground, that it is too modernist and intellectual to be of sound pedagogical value. Words like super-intellectualism, obscurity, ugliness, pure art can easily be levelled against it. But one must be reminded that this theory of poetry is fairly well founded in the old romantic notion that the materials of poetry are all about us, that poetry is not an isolated but a fundamental human interest—ideas certainly as honored as Wordsworth and Coleridge. Indeed these modernist poets could find in Coleridge words that complete their text: "This [power of poetic perception] reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities; of sameness with difference; of the general, with the concrete; of the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with the old and familiar objects." It is not to the tradition of English poetry that they oppose their teaching, but to the unstable emotional fringes that blur distinctions, and make poetry something that it is not. Like the great romantics they are bent on further sharpening the distinctions between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power (science and poetry). Impatient with critics who make substitutions for poetry, the editors of *Understanding Poetry* work simply to retain poetry as poetry.

They are in scholarly revolt against the nineteenth-century concept which excluded poets from the practical world—the nineteenth century that set the poet on a pinnacle—or in a corner, the poet as a still, small voice appealing to pale emotions, the ideals.

It was such a concept that begot the intuition and expressionist theories of Croce and Spingarn. They and other neo-romantics examining poetry as an unhealthy vestigial in a world that had outgrown it, almost completely neutralized the art. In such a background of thought *The Study of Literature* and many other books of "criticism" were undoubtedly conceived. The editors of *Understanding Poetry* believe that poetry has in all ages said *something*; it is a method of rational communication, a mode of public address. It is formed on a rational foundation, and speaks to the reason as well as the heart.

In this conclusion it appears that the editors of the recent volume have solved the two-fold dilemma of the poetry teacher; poetry is a proper subject for a college curriculum, and it can be taught intelligently. Nor will such a mode of instruction as they recommend drive students away from the art. If it is feared that a sensible approach will interfere with a student's "appreciation", he had better choose another subject for study. Let him appreciate the pictures in the newspaper. At any rate he deserves protection from pathetic defenses,—from scholarly excuses for what is not poetry.

I do not believe that *Understanding Poetry* will be the only book of its kind. Instead it has probably founded a dynasty. But it will be a model difficult to follow, not to mention its minor flaws. The editors appear perhaps too severe and uncompromising in some of their extended analyses. They must be necessarily aggressive, campaigning against the mild patronage in criticism which vitiates any sound poetical judgment. In fact their attitude is too "schoolteacherish" even for some school teachers. Therefore it is predicted that students may be more affected by, and consequently remember, the editors' enthusiastic prose analyses, and forget the poems themselves. In view of this possibility one is driven to ask, have the poems been "worth teaching as poetry?"

Which of the two books under discussion is more valid critically cannot be determined here. Each can be defended on its own critical grounds. But the two volumes do *dramatize* a sharp difference in recent poetical theory. They bring into the arena of the school room the precise conflict between the poetic principles of the late nineteenth-century neo-romantics and the modern metaphysicals.

*by Irene Weir*

## THE VOICE

If the Sea calls,  
And you hear;  
You must quickly go  
That's clear.

If a Voice calls  
From the sky;  
You must obey,  
Not knowing why.

Once only the call,  
Listen well;  
Flute-like the voice  
Clear as bell.

There's no escape,  
Once you hear;  
Yourself will know,  
Go, without fear.

One law of being,  
Unknown and hid;  
Makes you ever do  
What you are bid.

As a bird flying  
Towards the sun, sings,  
You will discover  
Songs and wings.

by A. L. Strout

## CULTURE AND CULT

### AMERICAN VS. ENGLISH LITERATURE

THOMAS Henry Huxley did more than champion Darwinism and shatter Bishop Wilberforce. Crusading against the "classical" tradition of his time, he insisted that modern science and modern languages are sufficient for "a liberal education".

Modern geography, modern history, modern literature; the English language as a language; the whole circle of the sciences, physical, moral, and social, are even more completely ignored in the higher than in the lower schools, he wrote in *A Liberal Education; and Where to Find It*, 1868. Up till within a few years back, a boy might have passed through any one of the great public schools with the greatest distinction and credit, and might never so much as have heard of one of the subjects I have just mentioned. He might never have heard that the earth goes round the sun; that England underwent a great revolution in 1688; and France another in 1789; that there once lived certain notable men called Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Voltaire, Goethe, Schiller. The first might be a German and the last an Englishman for anything he could tell you to the contrary. And as for science, the only idea the word would suggest to his mind would be dexterity in boxing.

Whether a knowledge concerning modern times might not have run parallel with a knowledge of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, it were futile to discuss here. Undoubtedly a swing of the pendulum from stratified authority was, in Huxley's day, desirable. George Eliot in fiction has given a vivid picture of Tom Tulliver's struggles with the Eton Grammar; and Hartley Coleridge in real life wrote his sister Sara in September, 1837: "There are not above three boys among my pupils to whom Latin will ever be of any use, except, perhaps, to

thrust them into professions for which they have no vocation." For better or worse, the old order changed in the United States just half a century after Huxley wrote, when Princeton gave up the requirement of Greek for the A.B. degree in 1918.

## II

Huxley wished to substitute for the remoteness of the Classics not merely the "consecrated doubt" of modern science,<sup>1</sup> but also a study of modern literature, French and German as well as English. Now in our own day a group of prophets in these United States desire a further orientation in our "culture". It is essential, in order to understand these gentlemen, to understand first of all the extraordinary importance of our own country.

Mr. H. L. Mencken admits that the modern American language is richer, racier, superior to the modern English, and that whatever may once have been true, the linguistic tail now definitely wags the linguistic dog. Messrs. H. S. Canby and Bernard De Voto of *The Saturday Review* lament the imbecilities of scholarly research in English literature—"in which even the lowliest minds can engage"—and applaud the "eupepsia" of research in American literature [i.e., literature of the United States]. "Research in American literature has taken a new course," runs an editorial on "The American Scholar" in *The Saturday Review* of December 26, 1936. "It has summoned history to its aid, and by doing so it has got out from behind a protective insulation too common in literary research. It has brought the study of literature into effective relationship with life." So assiduously has the field of English literature been studied, it seems, that only tenth-rate authors, or worthless aspects of more important authors, remain to be considered. "But in American literature there are still some first-rate literary figures quite unquarried by scholarship and whole battalions of second-rate and third-rate figures who can be studied with interest and profit" . . . One can only wait with bated breath the eupptic future. Certainly an historical and social approach to literature may be illuminating—as Leslie Stephen showed in *English Literature*.

<sup>1</sup>"The improver of natural knowledge absolutely refuses to acknowledge authority as such. For him, scepticism is the highest of duties; blind faith the one unpardonable sin". *On the Advisableness of Improving Natural Knowledge*, 1866.

*ture and Society in the Eighteenth Century* way back in 1904. And if certain "lowliest minds" may still prefer to consider some "worthless aspect" of *Paradise Lost* rather than embark upon the newer historical method which will bring Michael Wigglesworth, say, "into effective relationship with life", such minds may in time even develop the historical touch;—meanwhile they will at least have the satisfaction of dealing, however erroneously, with great poetry.

### III

Professor Howard Mumford Jones, evangelist of the new cult of America first, gives a typical example of his exhortation in an article entitled "The Orphan Child of the Curriculum", *The English Journal (College edition)*, May, 1936. Analyzing as fairly as possible his dozen pages, I should say his arguments run thus, as to why "American literature deserves a central place in American schools and colleges":

- 1). A large portion of British literature has but esoteric significance to most American students:
  - a). We cannot possibly approach British literature as a cultivated Englishman approaches it;
  - b). To the greater portion of our mixed population the British Isles are as foreign as France.
- 2). Yet our English departments in the colleges are staffed with experts in British literary masterpieces, and the teacher of American literature is often in a minority of one among a faculty of fifteen or twenty, with the result that a student receives only an elementary knowledge of the literary history of his own country, and often no knowledge of it at all.
- 3). The need of increasing our attachment to some humane tradition becomes every day more apparent. American literature is important:
  - a). Because it is the central literature in the American tradition;
  - b). Because it helps to give our students some knowledge of the unfolding of American culture;
  - c). Because the tradition of American literature is in the main a tradition of intellectual liberalism;
  - d). Because it is a repository of the national ideals, a proper corrective to the many varieties of sham Americanism.

Let us consider these points separately.

1). A large portion of English literature has but esoteric significance to most American students.

In a course for sophomore engineers this last semester I devoted one period a week to literature, considering Franklin's *Autobiography*, Huxley's *Essays*, Thoreau's *Walden*, and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The group by all odds preferred *Gulliver's Travels* to the others. Why? Possibly because the ignorance of the instructor eliminated nine-tenths of Swift's "esoteric significance". We skipped most of the contemporary allusions, and enjoyed the satire. After all, isn't it the *universal* in any piece of literature by any author which appeals to a reader, and isn't the "esoteric significance" pretty incidental?

Professor Jones, quoting Mr. Hilaire Belloc, remarks that Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" if recited in the English intonation will sound foreign to American ears, and that the emotion evoked by the poem will be foreign to American minds. I doubt if there exists as much difference between the average English and the average American intonation as exists between the intonation, let us say, of a soft-voiced Mississippian and a genu-ine down-Easter from Skowhegan, Maine. And admitting that a knowledge of Greek antiquity is not a national possession, if we explain to our students one word "Lethe-wards", and one line,

Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,

what is there in Keats's poem that they cannot grasp? . . . I should be sorry if American students were unacquainted with Bryant's "To a Waterfowl" or "Robert of Lincoln", with Christopher Pearse Cranch's "The Bobolinks" or Lowell's reference to the bobolink, "gladness on wings", "a brook o'laughter", in *The Biglow Papers*. I should be equally sorry if, regardless of intonation or classical attainment, they were unacquainted with the prophetic passion of Shelley's "To a Skylark," or with Keats's wistful tribute to the evanescence of beauty in "Ode to a Nightingale".

Professor Jones objects specifically to Wordsworth's "Lucy poems":

I am not being facetious when I suggest that the Lucy poems are rather remote from children whose fathers and mothers

cared nothing for Great Britain, whose religious traditions are not Anglican, and whose mores are a world removed from the customs of the Lake country over a century ago.

It is perhaps uncritical to lump the "Lucy poems" together. Of all five pieces Francis Jeffrey derisively quotes only two lines of the first in the *Edinburgh Review*:

"Oh mercy!" to myself I cried,  
"If Lucy should be dead,"

and one might argue that though this first poem as a whole depicts a true psychological experience, its concluding lines are, as Jeffrey intimates, obtrusive and absurd. Yet whatever the individual opinion of these pieces I fail to see how any one can object to Coleridge's summary of the last, "A slumber did my spirit seal", as "a sublime epitaph". In so far as Wordsworth caught the universality of homesickness—the yearning for his native country—the poems succeed and will continue to be read as long as the world reads poetry. What "the customs of the Lake Country" and what above all "Anglican traditions" have to do with the poems I fail to see. I am not being facetious when I ask Professor Jones if he would substitute "Thanatopsis", or "Brahma", or the transcendentalism of Brook Farm for the "Lucy poems", with better results. And I am very far from being facetious when I inquire how, if our students today cannot appreciate Keat's "Ode to a Nightingale" and Wordsworth's "Lucy poems", they can possibly read Chaucer and Milton and Shakespeare, whom not to have read, he says, "is not to have read at all".

2). Since the teacher of American literature is often in a minority of one among fifteen or twenty in the English departments, a student receives only an elementary knowledge (if any at all) of the literary history of his own country.

Just what new ration does Professor Jones desire in the English department? Would he have us change the proportion to fifteen or twenty teachers of American literature to one of English literature, or would he split the department fifty-fifty, or what? As long as Professor Jones sticks to glittering generalities he is safe, for nobody in his senses can object to a student's knowing as much American literature (or any other literature) as he has time for. I for one would be perfectly willing to add a year's sur-

vey of American literature to the requirement for the A.B. degree in English. I for one would be sorry if a course in Colonial American Literature or a year's course in American Drama were ever more than electives. If Professor Jones would present his new curriculum, with what he considers the proper proportion of American literature therein, one might come to closer grips with him in argument.

Professor Jones writes:

The problem is not whether we should throw out British literature and substitute American; the problem is whether we shall not give the national literature that place in the educational system which it amply deserves and which professional prepossession with British literature has for the last half-century denied it.

Has, actually, "professional prepossession with British literature" denied American literature its place in our curriculum? Take high school work and the freshman year of college: the two literatures receive about equal emphasis—as is true also of "type courses" of the sophomore year. In advanced courses in contemporary poetry and contemporary drama, in the short story, in the novel, American literature frequently looms large. Most English departments offer at least two—some offer from four to ten—courses in straight American literature,<sup>2</sup> every one of which so far as I know may be counted for the degree. Nor may it be superfluous to add that allusion to American literature in advanced English is common: even in my own courses, for example, I cannot mention Cowper without mentioning Whittier, Crabbe without mentioning Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*, the satire of the youthful Byron without mentioning the satire of the youthful Lowell, Rossetti without mentioning Amy Lowell and the Imagists. The problem seems to me how, in an already crowded curriculum, we can find room for a mass of new material without sacrificing the old. Ten electives in American literature (see footnote 2) will I hope satisfy even the Birdofredum Sawins . . . Curiously Pro-

<sup>2</sup>From an examination of 45 recent college catalogs (quite at haphazard because of what the local library happens to include) I present the following statistics regarding the number of courses offered in American literature: 3 colleges offer a single course; 17 offer two courses; 11 offer three courses; 5 offer four courses; 1 offers five courses; 3 offer six courses; 2 offer seven courses; 3 offer ten courses.

fessor Jones appears perfectly content with the *status quo* outside of the English department. Instead of combating the encroachments of that cuttlefish Education in the modern curriculum, for example, he accepts Education, though, he says, the requirement in that subject may run as high as eighteen or twenty hours, and laments that invariably American instead of English literature is sacrificed to that requirement.

He writes also:

The significant fact about American literature is not whether its three centuries outweigh the ten centuries of British literature, with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton thrown in; the significant fact is that it is important literature and that it is American. *In short, it is ours, and it is therefore part of that humane tradition which we are now struggling to inculcate* (italics mine).

Now this is something very different from saying that "the problem is not whether we should throw out British literature and substitute American." Professor Jones earlier takes for granted that our students will have read Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton. Our students should also read American literature, he argues, *because it is ours*. Assuming that students read only when they take courses in college, what will happen if, time lacking, they must sacrifice courses dealing with the great English poets to the various courses in American literature? To what extent, in short, does Professor Jones propose to let locality take the place of literary genius?

3). The need of increasing our attachment to some humane tradition becomes every day more apparent. American literature is the central literature in the American tradition.

What Professor Jones says here is excellent, especially when he points out, for example, that one of the elements of the American attitude "is a kind of humorous sanity." We need humorous sanity at all times, heaven knows, and especially in this age with its problems of racketeering, child labor, and industrial maladjustment. I should just like to remind Professor Jones that the Greeks had also a gift, *epieikeia*—which has been translated "sweet reasonableness"—and that the Englishman at his best seems to me cur-

iously to combine pugnacity with shy tenderness or wistfulness, a kind of humorous sanity also.

But Professor Jones, though he repeats that he has no desire to confine our students narrowly to American literature or American history, cannot forget the British incubus.

"When I find college students, as I do find them," he writes, "utterly unaware of the existence of American classics, or classifying (as a student of mine recently did) Jane Austen as an American novelist and Emerson as an English essayist—and this in perfect good faith—I think it is high time we stressed the American literary tradition a little more and the British literary tradition a little less."

It may cheer Professor Jones to know that one of my students partially restored the balance recently by calling Talleyrand a fan dancer, confusing that gentleman with Sally Rand, whose "Nude Ranch" constituted one of the attractions (I am told) of the Fort Worth Exposition a year or two ago. It may cheer him to know that a certain ignorance persists, also, in other fields. A dozen years back Mr. Kirsopp Lake in one of his lectures on Biblical literature at Harvard was discussing the Book of Job; the chap who sat next to me wrote "the Book of Jove" in his notes consistently throughout the hour. About the same time an undergraduate at Yale explained the lines in the prologue to "The Wife of Bath's Tale",

That sith that Crist ne wente never but onis  
To weddyng, in the Cane of Galilee,

by writing that Christ had been married only once! Undoubtedly students have difficulty with the "esoteric significance" of other literatures. Whether some of them need American literature in college as an antidote—or a rousing good course in a contemporary Business School—is a question.

#### IV

I agree, then, with Professor Jones thus far: that a year's survey course in American literature might well be added to the requirement for a student majoring in English. To emphasize American literature at the expense of English literature in our colleges seems to me absurd. We absorb the "American tradition" in and

out of every classroom. What we need is the tradition of the world, Chinese and Russian if we only had time for them, and English, at least, which providentially we can read without a crib.

No reference has been made in my remarks to the high-powered nationalism of Italy and Germany today. We are in no danger of following Nazidom; yet in actual practice I fear that in placing our own literature upon a pedestal our colleges might become a vast intellectual Rotary Club, with world literature nebulously circling our periphery. Huxley at least substituted the scepticism and free-mindedness of science, the richness of a thousand years of continental literature, for the classics; if we emphasize the literature of this country's three centuries at the expense of the literature of the rest of the world, we are leaving the Copernican and reverting to the Ptolemaic system in our culture.

It would be pleasant could academic discussions heat the blood of the public as much as, sometimes, they heat the blood of the participants. Did the "New Humanists" of a few years back accomplish very much? In showing that "romanticism", if overdone, may become morbid and fantastic, the New Humanists proved pretty clearly that "classicism", if overdone, may become cold and desiccated and formal. The trouble with the New Humanists was that each became a critical Procrustes: that anybody came to know beforehand exactly what each would say about any given piece of literature . . . Surely Professor Jones in championing the American tradition is immensely stimulating, and if he can manage to include the rest of the world quite possibly he is right. There is a magnificent line in Stephen Vincent Benét's poem *John Brown's Body*:

The catbird pecked away the nightingale,\*

which might become the war cry for a Renaissance in our poetry.

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\*Compare Hosea Biglow (discussing poets who ape the emotions of earlier writers):

This makes 'em talk o' daisies, larks, an' things  
Ex though we'd nothin' here that blows an' sings,—  
(Why, I'd give more for one live bobolink  
Than a square mile o' larks in printer's ink,)—

Any academic discussion might also that can heighten our interest in our own country, gives us confidence of a brave new world, perhaps stimulate young writers to achievement, should be welcome, provided only that it escapes the dangers of narrowness, and smugness, and arrogance. The Elizabethans, it will be remembered, produced not only great original pieces but also great translations. In Lowell's *Fable for Critics* occurs an allusion to John Bull:

No matter what John says, don't try to outgrow him,  
'Tis enough to go quietly on and outgrow him.

by A. E. Johnson

### THE DRINK

Through the mysterious doorway of the womb  
We come unto the strange vast inn of Life:  
A while, with wounded eyes, we scan the room  
And see, amid the ever-moving strife  
Of men foregathered for the drinking-spell,  
The beckoning tapster. Our drink he has,  
Cunningly mixed, unique, long-brewed and well;  
The wineboy serves, and as he serves he says:—  
Drink thou this drink; the tincture is thine own:  
Ask not of him or her what cloves may ease  
Thy throat; the bitterness is thine alone,  
And thine, mark well, the making of the lees:  
Drink proudly, then, nor let the goblet fall;  
Drink with a kingly grace—the gesture is all.

by William S. Knickerbocker

## DESIGNS ON MR. UPTON

### A RUMINATION ON SCIOLISM AND ITS ENGAGEMENTS WITH WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*"Upton, who did not easily miss  
what he desired to find."*

—DOCTOR JOHNSON

**I**N any case so important as that of Shakespeare," Mr. T. S. Eliot has written, "it is good that we should from time to time change our minds. . . . About any one so great as Shakespeare it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong."

Mr. Eliot, of course, does not always mean what he seems to say. His sprightly irony, now and then, has to be taken into account. He has a nice way of letting his interpreters hold the bag while he slides out from under. Perhaps in his assurance that "we can never be right" about Shakespeare, he indulges his ironic wit: certainly his point is permissible, for in the context from which his sentences are lifted he is playfully lampooning the subjectivity of contemporary men of letters who, in writing books about Shakespeare, create Shakespeare in their own images.<sup>1</sup> He even uses Shakespeare for his own purpose in his essay, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca", from which I have quoted. No one can reasonably object to this, so long as the interpreter or critic of Shakespeare knows what he is doing, and is sufficiently obliging, as Mr. Eliot is, to admit his intention.

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<sup>1</sup>"There is," said Mr. Eliot, "the fatigued Shakespeare, a retired Anglo-Indian, presented by Mr. Lytton Strachey; there is the Messianic Shakespeare, bringing a new philosophy and a new system of *yoga*, presented by Mr. Middleton Murry; and there is the ferocious Shakespeare, a furious Samson, presented by Mr. Wyndham Lewis in his interesting book, *The Lion and the Fox*. . . . If they do not give us the Real Shakespeare—if there is one—they at least give us several up-to-date Shakespeares." *SELECTED ESSAYS*.

Still, the assertion that "it is probable that we can never be right about Shakespeare" is open to question, reasonable though the main contention of Mr. Eliot's essay is; that we can never be sure that we can be right about Mr. Eliot merely from what he has written. Perhaps too many people are more concerned about Mr. Eliot himself than what he has written, completely obtuse to his challenge of the present notion that poetry is a means of communicating the personality of the poet: "If," said Mr. Eliot in *The Use of Poetry*, "poetry is a form of 'communication', yet that which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it." In much the same manner, perhaps too many people are more anxious to discover who wrote Shakespeare's plays and to fix, by inexorable logic, some writer other than Shakespeare himself.

We may flatly call this sophistry, if we please, but I prefer to call it sciolism, which one may think of as logical procedures energized by ingenuity establishing *a priori* notions by a crafty and procrustean eclecticism. Creating Shakespeare in one's own image or giving us an "up-to-date Shakespeare" are two familiar forms of it: attempting to prove that somebody-other-than-William Shakespeare wrote the plays in the First Folio is another form, and more vicious.

Mr. Eliot is himself no sciolist, yet he has just that faintest taint of sciolism which ought to make his admirers wary and alert. In spite of his alluring title, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca", he has some merry moments with sciolists before he soberly sufficiently to confess frankly his own intention to "suggest a number of reflections on literary criticism and its limits, on general aesthetics, and on the limitations of the human understanding." Even though he ostensibly discusses Senecan effects on the Elizabethans, he has very little to say about their effects specifically on William Shakespeare: in reality, he is offering under his decoy-title a defence of his own critical cleverness and modes of critical discrimination. Clever though this is, it is refreshingly intelligent and honest. Mr. Eliot was not deluding himself that he was writing about either Seneca or Shakespeare. But this does not fumigate him from the whiff of sciolism, in so far as he reveals himself as the diarist of a soul adventuring among masterpieces. From time to time, as in "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca",

he makes his essays his confessional, but he is not yet sufficiently Catholic, one presumes, to make his confessions purely and literally auricular to his private chaplain: he is still enough of a Protestant to publish abroad his pilgrim's progress and, from time to time, to bear witness to grace abounding to the chief of sinners.

"The last conventional Shakespeare" he says, "is banished from the scene, and a variety of unconventional Shakespeares takes his place. . . . Whether Truth ultimately prevails is doubtful and has never been proved; but it is certain that nothing is more effective in driving out error than a new error." That last sentence betrays Mr. Eliot's occasional sciolism, or his tendency to it, even if it is interpreted as sheer irony. Plausible as it appears because of the assured style in which it is expressed, it strikingly exposes the sciolistic corruption of the most brilliant and arresting contemporary man of letters. Mr. Eliot may himself, along with the contemporaries he cites, illustrate the occasional effects of sciolism among influential critics. It is a graceful sciolism, to be sure, and has its literary charm but it is still sciolism. It is the sciolism of immense ingenuity, only slightly cloaking an intellectual pride, plainly immune from the humility manifested by less skilful scholars who happen, unlike Mr. Eliot, to be researchers in the field over which he so airily glides. Readers who would never hear of Professor J. W. Cunliffe's solid *The Influence of Seneca in Elizabethan Tragedy* and would not have the patience nor the energy to read that scholarly work will flock to Mr. Eliot's tent to see him do the daring-young-man-on-the flying trapeze act, not knowing that Mr. Eliot disclaims exact knowledge of his subject and that he probably rehearsed his act by exposing himself to Dr. Cunliffe's exacting scholarship. Nor will they know that Mr. Eliot nowhere indicates the slightest notion that Elizabethan tragedy, deriving from Seneca rather than from Aristotle's *Poetics* as French tragedy did, was thoroughly shaped by the Senecan influence when Shakespeare inherited and altered it. Nor will they notice that Mr. Eliot, in his bright sciolism, completely ignores Seneca's contribution to Elizabethan tragedy of *exhibited* sensuous and violent action, contrasted with the *reported* action of Greek tragedy. To miss this, is to miss what Senecan drama was, and Shakespeare's, in its most striking characteristic. It is an insidious form of sciolism to write about Shakespeare, as Mr. Eliot does, making him the Archetype

of modern Humanism and target for an Anglo-Catholic attack on Senecan stoicism.

Granted, then, that we can "never be right about Shakespeare", we might, at any rate, distinguish between the authorship (real or supposed) and what Shakespeare's work means in itself. The problem we face is not unlike that which some of the more devout theologians face: there is both the problem of God, and there is the problem of *ideas about God*. Without agnosticism or atheism, they direct their attention to the latter as a necessary preliminary in the interim before the resumption of research of the former. And so, admitting the doubt Mr. Eliot raised about the probability of our ever being right about Shakespeare himself, we may legitimately concern ourselves with *ideas about Shakespeare*. If those ideas are rightly derived by a right method, then we may reasonably hope that the result will probably correspond more nearly with what Shakespeare really was—whatever that is!—than any idea not rightly derived because a wrong method was used. But, even then we should not delude ourselves that what we are doing is studying Shakespeare's art: what we are doing is incidentally making a contribution to historical knowledge. We are not studying Shakespeare.

## II

So much popular curiosity has recently been evoked by the publicity given to the opening of Spenser's grave in Westminster Abbey in an effort to discover a possible, and presumably ultimate, proof to establish the Shakespearean or non-Shakespearean authorship of the plays, and by the exhumations in Bruton Parish graveyard in renovated Williamsburg, Virginia, that one must be prepared for a "free-for-all" discussion by elegant amateurs, aided and abetted by their dialectical and forensic skill, to solve the mystery. Doubtless egalitarian opinion will take advantage of some of the solutions already proffered by ingenious logicians but egalitarian opinion is sufficiently fertile in invention to propose a few more. Though the problem has been formulated in divers ways already, a characteristic solution was made in England several years ago when Mr. Percy Allen, addressing the Gallery First-Nighter's Club said:

We have not known definitely and conclusively who the plays were written by, but now we know that the writer was Edward de Vere, the seventeenth earl of Oxford and lord great chamberlain of England in Queen Elizabeth's time. The intimacy with details of court life expressed in the sonnets and plays, as well as the dates of the various works, alone shatter the Stratfordian theory.

Other candidates for the authorship of Shakespeare's plays are the Queen herself, Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Walter Raleigh, the Earl of Derby, the Countess of Pembroke, the Earl of Rutland, and Lord Mountjoy. I doubt if I have exhausted the list.

Unintentionally, orthodox Shakespearean scholars have supplied the non-Shakespeareans with arguments to support the contention that almost anybody-except-Shakespeare wrote the Shakespeare plays. In their caustic disposals of fellow-scholars, some have used epithets, sometimes disprurteous, which have been seized by non-Shakespeareans in a sense not intended by their authors. Impressionistic commentators and reputable scholars have been classed in one category by undiscriminating non-Shakespeareans and compelled to be witnesses against the case for Shakespeare's authorship. When Professor Dover Wilson said, for instance, "We have been looking at Shakespeare through the wrong end of the biographical telescope", a non-Shakespearean would gleefully grasp that sentence and make it mean something quite different from what Mr. Dover Wilson meant: he may even make it mean that Mr. Dover Wilson doubts Shakespeare's authorship. The uncontrollable non-Shakespeareans conveniently confuse statements from all varieties of Shakespearean commentators—scholarly, critical, impressionistic, and "creative"—to serve their own purpose and are usually incapable of discriminating between the quality or competency of the commentators they are quoting. If Professor Kittredge, in one of his pleasantest and kittenish moments should say that "most Shakespearean scholars are blind or perverse", a non-Shakespearean can seize this sprightly, but not malicious, remark and make of it something new and strange. Professor Kittredge would *not* be casting doubt on Shakespeare's authorship but would be merely doubting conjectures to be contributions to Shakespearean scholarship, or rejecting comment or interpretations of Shakespearean allusions which are not only

inane, but false. Yet the non-Shakespearean would seem to make Mr. Kittredge say that Shakespearean scholarship is blind or perverse and that, since Shakespearean scholars are not to be accepted blindly or credulously, the populace might better seek some playwright other than William Shakespeare, the actor from Stratford, as the author of the plays in the First Folio. The non-Shakespearean enthusiast might defend his action by saying, "It is *logical!*"

Much as one may revere logicians and the disciplinary value of the science of Logic, one may suspect that an "appeal to logic" (varied by an appeal "to common sense") can cover much ingenuity and sciolism. Brilliant displays of both are evident in the works of those who so patiently and conscientiously spend their time finding secret ciphers which marvellously match their antecedent notions of some hypothetical secret and mysterious author of Shakespearean plays. Their triumphs of sinuous ingenuity leave S. S. Van Dine and Agatha Christie the merest dabblers in difficult and intricate problems neatly solved by inescapable processes of deductive logic. One gathers from the elation of non-Shakespeareans—an elation which is a compensation for the lack of serious attention paid them by orthodox Shakespearean scholarship—that there is an unspoken conviction they have that "men are hanged every day on much less evidence." Some of them happen to be lawyers by profession, and when they are not they tend to argue like lawyers and to think in the frames of that kind of logic which is so useful, and perhaps necessary, in the court-room.

No one, of course, supposes that lawyers, however skilful and ingenious they may have to be in pleading their cases, are desperately impoverished in a sense of justice: but surely lawyers do not complain when a literary scholar, disinterestedly observing their performances, suspects that only too frequently some lawyers, however highminded they may be as private citizens, argue to win a case and not to establish Truth or, for that matter, Justice. Non-Shakespeareans argue to win their cases, however persistently they plead that they are trying to establish the identity of the author of the Shakespearean plays. They are tireless in finding what James Harvey Robinson called "good" reasons, leaving orthodox Shakespearean scholars to discover "real" reasons. Non-Shakes-

peareans, having a case to prove, have a tricky way of opening the case against Shakespeare's authorship and then adroitly shifting the responsibility to the Shakespeareans to prove that Shakespeare wrote the plays. Perhaps they are not aware of this sliding out from under: and proceed to assert that Shakespeareans *cannot* because they *do not* take the responsibility (as if all the labors of Shakespearean investigators are not evidence that they, too, have been diligent in discovering who the *real* author of the plays was) even if they continue—in the absence of conclusive evidence to the contrary—to accept the traditional authorship. When non-Shakespearean sciolists put the burden of proof that William Shakespeare wrote the plays on the shoulders of acknowledged Shakespeareans they are asking for proof of something which, at the present time and with the available evidence, can only at best be partially proved. But that partial proof is sufficient proof, on grounds internal or external: from biographical and historical knowledge and from the contents of the plays themselves.

Sciolists, exercising their wits in demonstrating an authorship of Shakespearean plays other than William Shakespeare, argue their case in a curious manner. Without their knowing it, they are working in the most difficult field of literary scholarship which requires an induction too severe for their impatience and too exacting for the free play of clever guesswork. In one field of literary research—namely, in that of Holy Scripture—certain workable principles have been established which constitute what is called "higher criticism" but these principles are applied to historical documents of great antiquity whose purpose was not entertainment and the result of their application became a kind of literary geology. No similar principles have been finally worked out and established for the identification of authors of Elizabethan plays, though some exploratory efforts have been made which have not met with universal approval and acceptance by competent scholars. Edifying documents, like the Old Testament and the Gospels, which are in their nature historical and bear on historical events can be submitted to certain tests which, if not infallible, have some bearing—and usually much bearing—on the meaning of their contents. But sciolists assume that before the meaning of Shakespeare's plays and poems can be adequately discovered some author other than Shakespeare must be postulated. They work from an

*a priori* concept to the contents of the plays and poems, though they claim to base their identity of the author upon cryptic revelations in the plays which refute the traditional concept that Shakespeare wrote them. Competent scholars, unwilling to debate the issues with sciolists, have been tempted privately to say, when they have taken account or notice of the contentions of sciolists, "I don't give a tinker's damn who wrote the plays: I am concerned primarily with the plays and poems themselves, regardless of authorship." But, fortunately, they *are* concerned and their labors witness their intelligence and industry.

Sciolists also have a way of assuming quite generously that the playwright, whoever he was, made his plays a kind of public laundry; a form of acted diary of his moods and whims and grievances. Would any audience, even the liberal and susceptible Elizabethan, greatly care for any man's plays which used the "common" or "public" stage to air fluctuations of his private responses or the means of communicating only his secrets to the public? Accumulations of sciolism which non-Shakespearean enthusiasts have contributed add little to the knowledge or appreciation of the art of the plays though a kindly-disposed scholar might grant that sciolists do, every now and then, direct attention to quaint phrases which otherwise might escape his attention. Shakespeareans also learn from the sciolists many details of Shakespeare's contemporaries whom sciolists present as candidates for the authorship of the plays. Still, they are on their guard, even in admitting these additions to their knowledge, not to let themselves be distracted from their own primary obligations as Shakespearean scholars and critics which are only partly and subordinately historical, social, political, and religious.

The mode of proof used by sciolists is also open to scrutiny and analysis. Using what they so often call a "logical method", their notion of that method frequently fails to discern and admit its Procrustean motivation. A hypothetical case, very extreme, may be constructed for illustration. Let us suppose some European emigré arrives in America: abroad, he had been a lawyer but, exiled through the disasters of arrogant absolutism in his native land, on coming to America and entering another profession, proceeds to obliterate his painful memories by taking to Shakespeare. What better displacement of mind could he find than to plunge

into the problem of discovering who wrote Shakespeare's plays? The field is wide open. Convinced that so "ignorant" a lad as William Shakespeare, a Stratford booby who somehow managed to get to London and act in the Globe Theatre, he is bewildered and amazed by the brilliant and scintillating genius revealed in the so-called Shakespearean plays. How could an ignorant and half-educated rural youth, at best a run-of-the-mine actor, exhibit so sweeping a knowledge: of Latin and Greek, of military tactics, of religion, of art, of politics, of law-courts, of places in Italy (especially Padua!), in central Europe, in France. Obviously, our hypothetical amateur, as yet untouched by sciolism, suspects the traditional authorship and proceeds—perhaps aided by the researches of Baconians—to build up a conception of Shakespeare, blithely assuming that he must have seen all that he describes and experienced everything which he dramatizes. Sciolism, which is an insidious and pervasive malady and which often infects scholarship itself, begins its slow corruption of a healthy and wholesome mind and creates the condition in which cleverness, ingenuity, distortion, over-confidence, credulity, and other miasmas breed. Legal and forensic acumen, a disposition to literalize, and an ambition to set the world straight on so important a matter as the authorship of Shakespeare's plays begin to have free play. Slowly the corruption spreads. After a period of novitiate in the Baconian school of theory, the catechumen masters the art of debate and controversy and the technique of discovering odds and ends in the poems and plays in order to prove that Shakespeare did not write them. As the momentum increases, our novice sets up his own school and postulates, let us say, Roger Manners, the Fifth Earl of Rutland, as the likely candidate.

Your sciolist is now complete. He has a teleology which will neatly excite him to his researches and determine his findings. He proceeds to become dogmatic. He will begin to compose essays and books which he will probably have to print and publish at his own expense. His manner of communication, aiming at persuasion rather than at conviction, will be largely a manipulation of rhetorical and logical devices. His chief weapon of attack will be to ask questions of Shakespeareans which bear their own answers: yes! or no! For instance: "If other great poets are the torch-bearers of humanity, why should Shakespeare, the greatest of all, confuse

us with mist and mysteries?" Calling attention to the contradictory assertions of reputed Shakespearean scholars, he will ask, "Are all of them right, or all of them wrong?" Buttressing questions like these, he will examine testimonies by Shakespeare's contemporaries and dismiss them one by one with aspersions on their personal characters or their trustworthiness as witnesses: Robert Greene, Francis Meres, Ben Jonson, William Camden, Henry Chettle, and the rest. He will then proceed to assert dogmatically items about Shakespeare which make the hardened scholar dilate his eyes. He will find correlations between incidental lines and phrases in the Shakespearean plays and recondite pamphlets and verse (sometimes in Latin!) which bear only the remotest resemblance in diction and usually none at all in meaning or significance. His sciolism will then proceed more positively to fit his discoveries in the plays to the antecedent construct of his candidate for the authorship. It all works out very neatly. Every item joins: fits! But, alas!, he is thoroughly immune to any correction of his mind: partly because Shakespearean scholars do not point out his omissions from the plays which would disprove his assertions, but mostly because, by that time, sciolism has done its perfect work: it has not only made him "make up his mind" but has thoroughly closed it. If a competent Shakespearean scholar were to be patient and generous with him, our sciolist would have his Maginot line of defence: the secret code. He would, for instance, completely silence the Shakespearean by citing "the fact" that *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* is "signed Francis Bacon" and solemnly propound the following prescription for proof: "Apply the Elizabethan alphabet 1 — A, 2 — B, 9 — I and J, 20 — U and V to the words *Queen* and *seen*, spelt only in the last two lines in the modern spelling instead of *Queene* and *seene*, and *Banishment*. You will find Francis Bacon."

If Shakespearean scholars could afford to join issue with the sciolists, they could effectively use the same weapons with perhaps greater effect, if sciolists were susceptible to conviction. They could ask: (1) What motive had the-other-than-Shakespeare writer in writing the poems and plays at all? (2) What was the name of his son? (3) Why did he insist upon *any* authorship acknowledgement (supposing that "Shakespeare" was simply appropriated to hide the mysterious real author) when he could easily have remained

anonymous completely without resorting to befuddlement? (4) Why didn't the "secret" leak out, if by no other means than, say, by his enemies? (5) Why didn't Shakespeare's "fellows" of the acting company reveal his incompetency as an author? And so on. Perhaps the Shakespearean scholar might, as so many now do, say in reply to the non-Shakespearean sciolists: "No, I don't think William Shakespeare wrote the plays but another man of the same name did." They might also amuse themselves by reading Richard Whateley's *Historic Doubts Concerning the Existence of Napoleon Buonaparte*.

### III

What, then, would be the *right* method for rightly deriving an idea of Shakespeare which would more plausibly correspond with the man himself?

That method would, paradoxically, not be direct at all, in the sense of being over-hasty and overt acts of conceiving Shakespeare's "mind", his "personality", or his "character". On the contrary, it would be *indirect*. It would be a cumulative deposit from the reading of the Shakespearean plays and non-dramatic poems themselves, or seeing the plays acted, constantly corrected by sustained analysis of each of the works as artistic wholes and a persistent comparison of each with others in various aspects of dramaturgy, character-portrayal, and rhetoric (including grammar, diction, sentence variation, tropes, and metrics). Not scepticism concerning the possibility or probability of our ever rightly knowing Shakespeare himself but a naive agnosticism—an admission of ignorance—should prevail in the mind about the adequacy of one's conception of Shakespeare with a willing susceptibility to its correction in the light of one's expanding knowledge. For inevitably will some kind of a conception of Shakespeare arise in the mind so far as one becomes conscious of a directing intelligence which shaped the works themselves. But this conception should always be rigorously subordinated lest the beguiling mystery and fascination of the unknown (but not unknowable!) personality dispossess the primary addiction: the variety, the riches, and the power of the works themselves. Here the contribution of our contemporary "neo-metaphysicals", in their theory and practice of the art of poetry, helps immensely: poetry, when it is great

poetry, is "absolute": the passionate use of poetry as a means of "communication" of the poet's personality is rightly regarded as an impertinence, as well as an irrelevance. The poem or the play of Shakespeare is itself an act which precipitated an alteration of his personality. The work of art is not illuminated by the personality of the artist: the personality of the artist at a particular moment of a catastrophic series (discoverable only through the evidence of a disjunctured collection of creative acts) is revealed by the work of art. The torch, at a particular moment, throws a particular gleam upon the torch-bearer: the "torch" being the work of art; and the "torch-bearer" being Shakespeare himself.

But this private, individual reading, scrutiny, analysis, and comparison of Shakespeare's non-dramatic poems and his plays may, unless stimulated, guided, and checked by the works of competent commentators and scholars, in itself lead to abortions of emphasis and distortions of significances. Contemporary sensibility which is devoid of exact historical knowledge of Shakespeare's place in the development of the British drama, the physical and legal conditions of his stage, his acting company, his audience, and persons and events of his time may easily lead to reading back into Shakespeare's intentions and references ideas and purposes which are monstrous, when they are not ludicrous. Scholarly analysis and historical researches have supplied, and are supplying, immense stores of verifiable information which have served to inspire intelligent commentators to new and stimulating versions of Shakespeare's art. They constitute an impressive accumulation which constantly need revision, synthesis, and re-formulation. Contradictory they may be, or apparently contradictory, but what is contradictory in fact may be corrected by scholarship and what is contradictory in interpretation may be corrected by criticism. Scholarship collects, evaluates, and systematizes verifiable material: criticism ventures into the realm of opinion and interpretation, exercising judiciary functions controlled by the evidence which scholarship supplies.

Today this interdependence of Shakespearean scholarship and Shakespearean criticism is formally recognized. "For one of the chief critical maxims of the day," wrote Miss Anne Bradby\* "is

\*SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM. 1919-35. Selected with an Introduction by Anne Bradby. Oxford University Press. WORLD'S CLASSICS, CDXXXVI. 1936.

that nothing must be extracted from its proper context. . . . Poetry is not to be treated as religion, nor a poet as philosopher: . . . Shakespeare's context as it is now seen is the theatre, and England under Elizabeth. . . . And most often the functions of the scholar and the critic were divided in activity, even when they existed in one mind. They have now come nearer to each other, even though exploration is so highly specialized. . . . Where knowledge is ordered and centralized, each writer of any worth may use it as a foundation."

*by Dwight Durling*

### FIERY PARTICLE

Are prophets vindicated? Are sea and land  
In conflagration, the chemic funeral pyre  
Bearing the cindering earth, a burning brand,  
A world slow-dying in a dying fire?

Primordial energy in flame upthrusts  
The spark percipient its heats evoke  
To drift upon the night in wandering gusts  
Of darkness darkened with the swirl of smoke.

What shall the particle discrete, a note  
Of transient incandescence in an arc  
Closing beyond the narrow gleam of thought,  
Know of the vehement heart within the dark,

The furnace fiercely singing, whence it flashes?  
It flows from the chant of flame to the silence of ashes.

by Benjamin T. Spencer

## THREE WAYS TO SHAKESPEARE

THE VOYAGE TO ILLYRIA; A NEW STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE, by Kenneth Muir and Sean O'Loughlin. Pp. 242. Methuen and Co., London, 1937.

THE MEANING OF HAMLET, by Levin L. Schücking (trans. Graham Rawson). Pp. ix. and 195. Oxford University Press, London and N. Y. 1937.

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS: A COMMENTARY, by M. R. Ridley. Pp. 227. J. M. Dent and Sons, London.

WITH the advances of psychological studies in recent years, literature has come increasingly to be considered not only in terms of its aesthetic worth or its historical implications, but also more narrowly in terms of the particular social or biographical events of which it is held to be the expression. The assumption frequently follows that literature is interesting chiefly as a study of such influences, or that it can be properly understood only in such terms. Accordingly, when a writer's milieu is not a matter of clear, historical record, his countless relationships must be discovered, or, if not discovered, hypothesized; and then conclusions follow apace. It may be true, as Emerson said, that we know Shakespeare more fully than any other person in all modern history, but that knowledge is with difficulty shaped into the kind of circumstantial framework which some would insist requisite for an understanding of him. And yet most of us would admit the inevitable temptation to search for those personal events, those Stratford and London happenings and associations, which in part gave body and pattern to his drama and set the tone of his poetry. To some, possibly like Mr. Leslie Hotson, there are rewards enough in the findings *per se*; to others, like Mr. Kenneth Muir and Mr. Sean O'Loughlin, the findings must correlate with Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, and in the end the events and the poetry stand, neither supreme, integrated as a total and illuminating human experience. With honest awareness of the difficulties inherent in their method, the authors of *The Voyage to Illyria* have bravely sought a profounder understanding of Shakespeare through a continual inter-

play and cross reference between a reconstruction of his life, based largely on his dramas, and a *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* interpretation of passages in his plays. The dramas and poems as independent units are frankly broken down, becoming, as it were, some forty scenes in the larger and more significant drama of Shakespeare's struggle toward Illyria. The authors' justification of this method may be inferred from their concluding remark on *The Tempest*: "Considered in isolation, *The Tempest* is a charming romance. Considered in its place in the canon, it is one of the surpassing achievements of the human mind."

The figures and events in this larger drama of Shakespeare are not new: Ann Hathaway, shrew and seducer, is the early source of Shakespeare's confusion; then there is "the sensual feast" of the Dark Lady; then the estrangement from and finally the complete rupture with Southampton, and Shakespeare's long brooding on betrayal and ingratitude. Forced "to grapple with realities, and to cast away the hope of Platonic compromise", Shakespeare gives us between 1598 and 1610 first the bitter cries of his unavailing struggle and then, at last, the new vision as Illyria comes clearly to view. Inconstancy and impurity of woman and ingratitude are the cankers which impel his tragic expression; all dramatic sources and plots are transformed, even wrenched, by these obsessions in order that "the synthesis of sex and love which had been denied him all his life" may be found. But Shakespeare, like Romeo, is also concerned with the problem of death, for in his mind it is intimately connected with love, even from his earliest love tragedy. By the late 1590's he has lost faith in life (i.e., in love), as the tenor of *Henry IV, Part II* shows. At the turn of the century, however, there is a temporary resurgence of faith which allows the creation of his three finest comedies,—a belief in love and in man's victory over death and time, the evidence of which is to be found in *The Phoenix and the Turtle* (1601). In that poem, coming though it did after his final break with Southampton, Shakespeare holds love (i.e., the love of true minds, not of the sexes) an absolute, and only this vision enables him to endure the tempests of the years of tragedy, which may be defined as the "conflict between the vision and life as we know it". After the betrayal by Southampton, he vainly seeks oblivion in sex, and the result of this struggle to find an object for his affections is not

only the familiar sex-imagery and cynicism of such plays as *Lear* and *Timon of Athens*, but also the death of all pure heroines, because no good woman could live. Meanwhile, in the dark and bitter comedies he is beginning to accept death: "Be absolute for death." But with *Antony and Cleopatra* the mists of doubt begin to clear: "The fusion of love and sex, with its consequent regeneration, is evident." Shakespeare's attitude toward death is almost serene; death is conquered by love. His solution of his problem of sex is possible only because "he had met a woman in whom his desire and affection could reunite". *Pericles* further attests Shakespeare's return to a belief in love and virtue. And in *Cymbeline* Posthumus' spirit of forgiveness is Shakespeare's forgiveness of Southampton, Imogen is the Phoenix incarnation of his ideal, and Fidele's funeral is his acceptance of death. *The Tempest* stands as a Christian parable, the revelation of Shakespeare's final position: a belief in "an overruling Providence, in forgiveness", in "the passing beyond good and evil", and in "the supreme importance of love and immortality".

The view that the changing temper of Shakespeare's plays reflects the changing attitude of Shakespeare the man has been expressed by Sir Edmund Chambers, Mr. John Middleton Murry, Professor Dover Wilson, Professor Wilson Knight, and other notable contemporaries, each arriving at this conclusion by his own particular method of criticism or scholarship. *The Voyage to Illyria* raises doubts, therefore, not so much on the grounds of its general thesis as by the uncertainty of the events which are adduced in explanation of the evolution of Shakespeare's faith, the method utilized for arriving at the mind of the poet, and its sweeping application to the plays themselves. The nature of the friendship between Southampton and the poet is so slightly known that the 'facts' of that relationship as set forth here may be said to be deduced almost completely from a culling of convenient passages rather than to be verifiable circumstances in the light of which the tendencies of the dramas may be interpreted. Indeed, when the few biographical facts available do not agree with the thesis at hand, the assumption is easily made that Shakespeare is "not adhering to mathematical accuracy". Other Shakespearean students who have sought to chart Shakespeare's own spiritual drama from his plays have more convincingly considered the effect or meaning

of the dramas as units or have made comparative studies of the imagery in the canon as a whole; they have seen values reflected in the plot and in the total impression of the play rather than in individual passages or situations. The methods which the authors of *The Voyage to Illyria* utilize, however, are the more dubious reliance upon Shakespeare's possible symbolism and recourse to whatever passage will provide the sentiment appropriate to their hypothetical Shakespeare. If it is necessary to find Shakespeare opposed to rebellion, Hotspur is brought in and his voice labelled Shakespeare's; then soon afterward, this strange conclusion: in Falstaff Shakespeare embodied his views of humanity in 1597-98. And again, when it is necessary to show that Shakespeare at a particular time believed in nothing, Northumberland performs the service. Clarence, Romeo, Jaques, Caesar, and Hamlet in turn become Shakespeare. Surely it is impossible to assume that any character who speaks with conviction is voicing the dominant mood or personal experience of Shakespeare at the time the play was written. By such a procedure it is possible to fashion many Shakespeares, as the history of Shakespearean criticism shows. The difficulty is not, therefore, that *The Voyage to Illyria* does not explain enough, but that it explains too much. The cruxes of the plays begin pleasantly and easily to dissolve: Valentine's strange surrender to and forgiveness of Proteus owes nothing to Elizabethan ideas of friendship or to Shakespeare's dramatic apprenticeship, but is a picture of Shakespeare, the wronged and noble friend; Hal's renunciation of Falstaff, with its harsh doom, is not to be accounted for by dramatic preparation or Renaissance political theory, but is Southampton's betrayal of Shakespeare; Brutus' betrayal of Caesar and Enobarbus' desertion of Antony are resolved into the ignominious treachery of Southampton; and Hamlet's mystery springs from Shakespeare's thrusting a great personal indignation into a plot requiring a simple, thoughtless soldier. It is entirely probable that in such situations Shakespeare's poetry owes its intensity to similar experiences in his own life, but that is not to say that every possible character was wrenched into a reflection of his own bitterness. Furthermore, violence is done frequently to the integrity of the dramas, so that they cease to be comprehensible in their own terms: Oberon's loss of the Indian boy is Shakespeare's loss of Southampton to the Dark Lady; the

characterization of all shrews and the insistence on pre-nuptial chastity in *The Tempest* reflect Shakespeare's seduction by Ann Hathaway; Ophelia, Desdemona, and Cordelia are primarily the poet's burning attempts to satisfy his disbelief in the virtue of women; Antonio's sadness at the loss of Bassanio is a personal cry, not intended for the audience at all, issuing from Shakespeare's loss of a friend to a woman. All women whom Shakespeare scorns bear the stamp of the Dark Lady; all heroines before 1598 are idealizations of Southampton.

Having discovered this key to unlock Shakespeare's heart, the authors discard all others. The force of current philosophies and conventions, the necessity of approximating truth in historical characters and actions, the demands of dramatic technique and the Elizabethan stage are all left out of the reckoning. Even studies of Shakespeare's imagery, such as Miss Spurgeon's, are utilized here not with the aim of probing to the imaginative core of the play in which the images occur, but are regarded as indices to Shakespeare's mind outside its particular dramatic employment. Words, such as "Nature" in *Lear*, in defiance of the context and of Elizabethan denotations, are made to wear the colors of the authors' thesis. The result is a readable "new study" which will attune one more sensitively to the lyric Shakespeare and reawaken one to the possibility that many of the most vivid scenes in the dramas owe their quality to events hidden from us; but the study will not appreciably deepen one's understanding of Shakespeare nor change the picture of the man which all have to some extent constructed, possibly from a sounder method.

In Professor Schücking's *The Meaning of Hamlet* the lyric Shakespeare almost disappears; in his stead appears a dramatist who was markedly conditioned in his technique and point of view by the Elizabethan theatre and the "intellectual tendencies of his time". Professor Schücking, it is true, admits a broad reflection of Shakespeare's personal fortunes and attitudes in the plays, seeing in Hamlet the "echo of happenings that have shaken the author's soul to its very depths", and finding in the hero of the play more of Shakespeare than in any other character. The primary cause of this "sudden break" which came "more or less half-way through his dramatic career" is, in the author's opinion, the politi-

cal fortunes of Essex. Yet Professor Schücking will not be led into the admittedly fascinating search for further biographical details, feeling that "we stand on firmer ground when we come to discuss what it [*Hamlet*] reveals concerning his [Shakespeare's] objective thought". Accordingly, the "meaning" of *Hamlet* is to be sought through an inquiry into the Elizabethan Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Hamlet to "discover wherein lie, for us, the secrets of the almost miraculous effects of Shakespeare's art". Professor Schücking, in effect, attempts the enrichment of our understanding of Shakespeare by explaining wherein and why he differs from us; consequently, he interprets always with a consciousness of literary fashions and changes of taste, utilizing such terms as "literary baroque" and eighteenth-century "sensibility" to explain Shakespeare's workmanship or materials. He emphasizes the difficulties and bewilderment of the modern confronted by Hamlet; he would seem to disclaim, at least from the scholar's and critic's point of view, any concern with Hazlitt's famous "It is *we* who are Hamlet."

What, then, is this Elizabethan Hamlet whom we must recognize before we can arrive at any "satisfactory conclusions" about the play? Professor Schücking admits at once that he is an elusive figure because of changing ethical views and dramatic techniques. Convinced, however, that a "realistic" or historical approach to the play will eliminate the fuzzy misapprehensions of the average modern reader and that Shakespeare's characters were molded not so much by his personal experience as by current philosophical and psychological theories, Professor Schücking examines these theories and emerges with Hamlet "the melancholic", caught in the sweep of mechanistic and materialistic classical philosophies in Elizabethan England and exhibiting an "heroic 'pathos'" which was taken over from the antique and which was fashionable at the turn of the century, as Marston, Chapman, and Jonson show. Then follows a description of the "melancholy man", of whom so much has been made by recent Elizabethan scholarship: his cynical observations on women, his eroticism, his witticisms, his paradoxes, his "mantle of Senecan Stoicism"—with the somewhat puzzling conclusion "that nearly all the tragedies of Shakespeare show the antithesis of the Stoic doctrine of the rational man". Thus an understanding of this Elizabethan type is once

more made the *sina qua non* for "satisfactory conclusions" about *Hamlet*. But the title of Professor Schücking's book prompts this question: granted that *Hamlet* conforms to an Elizabethan psychological-dramatic vogue and granted the relevance of this knowledge in the total picture of Elizabethan drama, how far have we progressed toward the "meaning" of *Hamlet*? Soon a baffling cleavage looms between *Hamlet* as a stage type and *Hamlet* as a man expressing a common ethical conflict. As a result *Hamlet's* bitter remarks in the play scene are adjudged not cynical or reflective of an "emotional relationship", but merely "a typical example of the 'humour' of the melancholic"; and in the nunnery scene *Hamlet* is "only continuing the role . . . of the melancholic, who finds an outlet for his cynicism and his hatred of women by trying to wound them". *Hamlet's* failure to kill Claudius is dismissed as an example of contemporary "baroque". *Hamlet* thus becomes a clinical drama, and our perennial interest in its hero is discovered to be in his novelty, not in his universality. Finally, it is asserted that Shakespeare's aim was to "depict eccentricities"; and thus the dramatist is pictured as choosing characters and situations for the depiction of a psychological abnormality *per se*. Followed strictly to its logical conclusion, this approach would confine the wide range of Shakespeare's intuitions and expression of vast experience within the distortions of the crude beginnings of psychology. Of course *Hamlet* does illustrate Elizabethan conceptions of "melancholia" and the "baroque", and this we should know. But how conclusively the description of a piece of literature in terms of current literary conventions and its scientific implications (especially in periods where art was relatively much more highly developed than "science") answers the question of "meaning" is a matter that necessitates the closest scrutiny in any estimate of literary value. Apparently in defense of the adequacy of such an approach Mr. J. Isaacs has insisted that modern Shakespearean criticism faces the author squarely and does not "dodge him by excursions into philosophy, history, or ethics". Yet once one has immersed himself in this strange Elizabethan vacuum, what then?

In his running commentary on the play, however, Professor Schücking constantly refers to a *Hamlet* whom we recognize as only incidentally the Elizabethan melancholic. This earlier patho-

logical Hamlet, who is "surely not lacking in noble attributes", who has "fascinated posterity chiefly as a psychological portrait", tends to fade before the presence of a figure whose "inherent nobility" accounts for the pity of the audience, "a proud man, who makes the highest demands on his own nature", who is "mercilessly honest". The resultant Hamlet is not merely a figure whose tragic flaw has been unsatisfactorily explained in terms of Elizabethan melancholy. Rather there is a failure to integrate the pathological and noble in Hamlet into a comprehensible and commanding tragic hero, a failure which will leave thoughtful readers of *The Meaning of Hamlet* with the feeling that the title of the book promises too much. Occasionally in such a statement as "in this morbid attitude there lies what is most moving, most eternally human, in the problem of Hamlet", there is a recognition of the unresolved difficulty, but for the most part the neurotic, "fantastic-melancholic" takes uneasy turns with an incompatible and more profoundly moving tragic figure, and the "meaning" of Hamlet remains chiefly in terms of historical correlation. In general, Professor Schücking's long section on the action of the play is much less rewarding than the recent analysis of the action by Professor Dover Wilson and Mr. Granville-Barker. Many of the skilful bits of characterization and subtle dramatic tensions which do violence neither to Shakespeare's possible intention nor to Elizabethan stage conventions are overlooked; a strangely unconvincing, modern psychological solution is offered to account for Ophelia's bawdy songs; and in the name of "realism" the Elizabethan audience is saddled with a literal-mindedness which precludes their grasping any play on words, such as Hamlet's terming Polonius a "fishmonger", or their responsiveness to metaphor, so that they must judge Hamlet physically weak because he seeks to indicate the relation of Claudius' goodness to his father's in terms of the relation of his own strength to that of Hercules! Yet in a small way *The Meaning of Hamlet* does what the author's *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays* did so significantly; it reminds the modern reader of what the authors of *The Voyage to Illyria* ignored; that there were certain unique conditions in the Elizabethan dramatic world which call for consideration in any adequate interpretation of Shakespeare's plays.

Professor Ridley has no key to Shakespeare. In his *Shake-*

*speare's Plays; A Commentary* he effectively ridicules the pretensions of those schools of critics who from year to year proclaim an approach to Shakespeare which is exclusively and finally valid. Professor Ridley is not uncritical in his estimate of the worth of the classicists, romanticists, or realists; but his acceptance of much of Professor Stoll does not lead him, as it has occasionally led others, to a hasty dismissal of Bradley or J. M. Murry. One may therefore expect to find in Professor Ridley's evaluation of the plays echoes of many former commentators, and in fact the echoes are present: of Bradley often, of Professor Dover Wilson occasionally, and even, one fears, in the consideration of *As You Like It*, of the pipings of Mrs. Jameson or the Reverend Stopford Brooke. But there is also constant evidence, within the limits of the book, of an acquaintance with the more technical research of modern European and American scholars on problems relating to the text, topical allusions, and theatrical conventions. Recent controversies over the authorship of the *Henry VI* plays, the structure of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Falstaff's cowardice, and Elizabethan melancholy have left their mark in the commentary. Moreover, the significance of much of this research becomes evident frequently through a new emphasis in Professor Ridley's point of view. And though the volume is not directed towards scholars but rather, "as a strictly limited amount of straightforward criticism", toward "readers and seers" of Shakespeare, all who are concerned with what Shakespeare means to those thoroughly acquainted with him will be interested in the "impression that each play produces" on the author. Though the volume offers comment on all the plays and touches many fundamental problems of Elizabethan scholarship and criticism, it is neither a handbook to Shakespeare nor a repository of Shakespearean learning. Its purpose and approach are similar to Sir Edmund Chambers' *Shakespeare: A Survey* of a dozen years ago, and its pages contain the same mature judgments on the character and technique of all the dramas in the canon.

The result of the scholarship of the new "realists" often, ironically, has been an explanation of Shakespeare in terms of his Elizabethan milieu so thoroughgoing that, as among the romantic critics whom they profess to despise, he becomes absolved of all dramatic errors. For Shakespeare's perfection Coleridge could give credit

to Divinity; Professors Schücking and Stoll can resort to an exposition of the technique of the Elizabethan soliloquy or the revenge play, and soon no flaw in artistry is left at which to cavil. There is, to be sure, a danger of assuming an absoluteness in modern dramatic technique and a primitiveness in Elizabethan stagecraft; but Professor Ridley is surely justified in positing, in opposition to Professor Schücking, a continuity in human attitudes toward major situations and passions that form the core of Shakespeare's plays, a continuity which would imply the relative failure of some of his earlier and later plays even in his own day. Thus neither Southampton's betrayal nor the demands of Elizabethan theories of friendship will convince Professor Ridley that *Two Gentlemen of Verona* contains anything but a weak characterization in Valentine and a botched conclusion. Nor does he fear to deflate such favorites as Bassanio, Portia, and Antonio when he feels that an unwarranted sympathy has been bestowed by undiscriminating romanticism. And as for Hal: he finds "not a trace of subtlety or of fineness in his composition". On such larger themes as the evidence of Shakespeare's reconciliation with the world in his last "romances", Professor Ridley's remarks suggest the value of a fresh approach to the plays without preconceived conclusions. Shakespeare's experience of life had a direct effect upon his work, in the author's opinion, though it is dangerous to "attempt to deduce them [the circumstances] in any detail from the work". Yet those who will lay themselves "honestly open for the plays to work their wills" will find, he thinks, not a Shakespeare who has won his way to a serene faith in "the essential goodness of human nature" or "the automatic power of this goodness to triumph over evil"; rather "it was a tired kind of peace". And Prospero he judges "not even noble", but a potent magician who used his arts to kindly ends and to rescue his daughter and himself "from the intolerable tedium of the island".

Shakespeare is worth our study and exposition, Professor Ridley seems to say, because his plays embody truth and beauty. The *Commentary*, therefore, attempts not only to judge the plays as they clarify significant elements in human experience, but also to render Shakespeare's medium, dramatic and poetic, more comprehensible to us. Our appreciation of the lesser comedies, like *The Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, he can heighten by

his perception of Shakespeare's greatness as shown in his skilful handling of delay in the farcical repetition and in his light and delicate parody. He can reawaken our interest in the history plays by reminding us that in all of them the hero is England; he can lead us toward an appreciation of the subtlety of *Twelfth Night* by showing Malvolio from a producer's point of view; he can, in Bradley's vein, descant upon the philosophic implications concerning the unchangeable *good* in *Lear*, or analyze the motives of Iago. Though some will be disappointed at not finding a new Hamlet or Falstaff here, they may at the same time rejoice that no attempt is made to deny the validity of an almost universal dramatic impression for the sake of novelty and that there is no insistence, in the name of science, on fitting the characters into some Procrustean formula. "*Hamlet* is not primarily a study in the psychopathology of melancholia or of anything else. It is a play . . ."

*Shakespeare's Plays*, therefore, is not a sensational book, but it is pleasing in its simple comprehensiveness. Incorporating, as it does, many of the "advances" of recent Shakespearean scholarship (though Miss Spurgeon's point of view, among others, is neglected), it serves as a sort of tonic norm in modern Shakespearean criticism. Perhaps the time has come for another really great book on Shakespeare, embodying the best that the twentieth century has brought to an understanding of his work, as Coleridge and Bradley in turn embodied their periods. Professor Ridley will not write it, but his commentary offers a very modest hint of what direction it may take.

by Aileen Wells Parks

## LEVIATHAN

### AN ESSAY IN INTERPRETATION

**A**LMOST a generation after the death of the unhappy prophet, this, his greatest novel, focused upon him the attention of critics at home and abroad. When *Leviathan* was first published, the critics of that time saw in it only a novel of adventure, a superb tale ruined by three discordant elements: one, an attempt to make of a novel, a serviceable and profitable handbook on whaling; two, an obscure, digressive, and retarding allegory of *je ne sais quoi*; three, a metaphysical wildness of style. These criticisms served effectively, for over half a century, to minimize the scope and power, the tremendous bulk, of *Leviathan*.

The French critics early, though but dimly, discerned the far-reaching implications of the novel but they misunderstood both the author and his intent, a misunderstanding which every later critic has shared, or added to.

Mr. Waymond Reaver, to whose resuscitation of *Leviathan* every serious student of the novel must feel greatly indebted, essayed the first modern interpretation. To him, the author was a Narcissus-like figure, eternally seeking a phantom in the oceans of life and finally destroying himself in the quest of his vision with his object unachieved.

Mr. H. L. Dawrence, a mystic and esthete, adumbrates his own novels, while he leaves *Leviathan* unexplained. In his Freudian interpretation the great whale becomes the blood consciousness of the race, pursued by that abstract intellect which, in his estimation, hurries to its doom the Caucasian race.

The followers of Jung make a subtle shift: the whale is to them the symbol of the Unconscious which torments Man, yet spurs him on to his proudest and mightiest achievements. One variation of this interprets Ahab, Man, in rebellion against the Deity, the whale.

A typically English critic, canny and cautious, offers a variety of explanations. Ahab represents Man set against the Infinite with its intangible malignity; the conflict between man and beast may also represent the religious controversy between body and soul; or an attempt to resolve the old question of the Platonic myth.

Mr. Wyck van Vrooks makes of the white whale a personification (like Grendel in *Beowulf*) of the grimdest aspect of Nature; he sees in the epic the consciousness of northern peoples that life depends on unremitting struggle with the elements.

To M. S. Lumford, the sea is life, the whale is the universe, or at least is the demonic energies in the universe which frustrate the spirit of man. The action moves on two planes simultaneously: on the lower is the story of adventure; on the higher, a parable of the mystery of evil and of accidental malice in the world. Mr. Lumford throws in, somewhat as an aside, the idea that this great author first cast aside the classical and the Christian mythologies, and that he substituted for these outworn symbols the living and immediate and scientific symbols of natural law.

The wildest guesses, as usual, have been advanced by the so-called proletarian critics, who have found a class struggle in *Leviathan*, but have chosen at random among Ahab, the whale, and the crew for some representative of the proletariat. Their arguments have no value because they have attempted to prove the author a communist, when he was, indisputably, a distributist.

## II

This summarizes briefly, yet not too inaccurately, the divergent, and, in many cases the far-fetched, interpretations of our most articulate critics. They have presented persuasively but unconvincingly a great many plausible ideas but they have unanimously overlooked the true (which is the most obvious) meaning. Unfortunately they have at the same time degraded the author from his rightful position as the keenest observer, the most thoughtful commentator of his time, and the clearest prophet of those unhappy days that were to be.

He examined unsparingly the structure of the society about him and in *Leviathan* he wrote the most scathing indictment of it. He

embodied all his comprehension of that Society's forces, influences and policies in an allegory which foretold the doom of a culture and of a civilization.

In Captain Ahab, this far-seeing author sketched the first conscious portrait of the "Rugged Individualist"—a conception which, with a slightly different placing of emphasis, has been deified until recently by many citizens in our commonwealth. Ahab undoubtedly represents the finance-capitalist, with a symbolic missing leg which shows that sensibility has been amputated from his make-up in the bitter struggle with the brute whale, industrialism. The embittered captain smuggles with him a secret crew: to any person who can read between the lines, these heathen represent the policies and arrangements that each industrial captain, given supreme responsibility, makes without the knowledge or approval of his partners or his employees.

The blindness of the partners is indicated at the beginning; the blindness of the employees runs through the book. The men are more than men; they are also symbols of great organizations caught in this cunning mesh. The first mate is a figure-head of the church, which gives from time to time a slight and impotent warning; the second mate is a faithful, unthinking adherent—probably a politician. The crew are the employees, with the individual characteristics and gradations in skill and rank that would be found in any group of workers who no longer own and control their businesses.

A few items can not be interpreted with absolute certainty. It seems probable that the English captain symbolizes the "live and let live" policy; presumably his humanitarianism brought him and his crew to a peaceful and happy harbor. But these obscure points can safely be left to more learned scholars; it is sufficient to point out, here, the correct interpretation of *Leviathan*, and to note that its prophet-author foretold the doom which threatens to close upon us.

by Sally Harrison

### "I SHOT THE ALBATROSS"

FAREWELL THE BANNER, "Three Persons and One Soul": (Coleridge, Wordsworth and Dorothy), by Frances Winwar. Doubleday-Doran. September 23, 1938. \$3.50. Illustrated.

Most writers would have made this Wordsworth's story, not Coleridge's. For over a century now, the famous three-way friendship between Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Dorothy has been treated in the conventional way, with the emphasis on the development of Wordsworth's genius. But Frances Winwar is the Wedding Guest in three to whom revelations are made. She can see a ghost at the feast, and her new book, *Farewell the Banner*, has draped the albatross of Coleridge's dead genius fast about Wordsworth's neck for all time. Not that Mrs. Winwar makes any such claim. Nowhere in her account has she even mentioned the parallel which nonetheless is laid bare by this new story about Coleridge.

Nor is there categorical talk of blame and responsibility. The author knows a thing or two, and one is that victims connive at their own undoing; and another is that a man with a daemon as important for the world as Wordsworth's has no room or time for anything that fails to serve it. For the eternal glory of poetry, Wordsworth's ship came safe to port as it had to do. But there were corpses aboard. Even in his lifetime, his critics pondered the significance of his renunciation of the French revolutionary cause; and after his death they had Annette Vallon's skeleton to explain away. The new book adds Coleridge and Dorothy Wordsworth to "that ghastly crew".

As for Coleridge's connivance at his own ruin, that is perhaps the main burden of her thesis. It is death to a poet to love another's genius better than his own. But there is more than one way of dying, and now that the tale is told, Coleridge's too great love for, dependence upon, adoration of Wordsworth, call it what you will, joins the roster of the heroic tragedies of the world. This is the tale of a poet who died young, and who knew he had died,

though he actually lived and worked for almost as long a span afterwards. The brilliant career of Coleridge the critic and lecturer hardly comes into Mrs. Winwar's frame: that was a "posthumous career", so far as poetry was concerned.

Accepting once and for all his god's dictum that he was no poet, Coleridge never found the comfort of knowing his great friend for the self-centered, loveless man he was. However much the habits of opium, laziness, and fantasy contributed, the blow that killed came from Wordsworth, and Coleridge never recovered faith in himself. However, there is evidence that at least once in his ruined years, Coleridge suspected that his defeat lay in that very threesome he had doted upon and from which he had expected only love and mutual, creative fructification.

The fructification, as well as the love, flowed only in one direction—toward Wordsworth. And that, too, is a thought that lies too deep for tears. But it was not for Wordsworth's eye and heart. The man who found meaning in a tree, a wall, or a flower, who loved them and his own deep thoughts so perfectly that he could present them whole to the world for all time, could not love his friend (or anyone) well enough to save him—only just well enough to douse forever the unearthly flame of a genius unlike his own.

The woman who sees Coleridge with her heart has written a book that has the pity and finality of great tragedy. It is difficult to chart the course that brought her to this achievement. The writing tricks that made *Poor Splendid Wings* so valuable a re-creation of a time and a setting are discoverable in the new book. But her story of the Pre-Raphaelites was nothing but a bag of tricks in comparison. Here the same tricks serve a noble end, having ceased to be an end in themselves. Rossetti and his clique came alive on the stage of her former book, but Mrs. Winwar's Coleridge is another kind of thing. If Coleridge had never actually lived, her book would still reveal one of the basic tragedies the world contains.

The scholarly criticism of Frances Winwar is that she doesn't write literary criticism, and especially that she fails to take note of the great body of critical explorations and discoveries in the literature on the subject. Indeed, she writes as if her subject were brand-new. When her conclusions run counter to hoary critical pronunciamientos, she just ignores them right and left. Notes, counter-

propositions, all debate, are outside the scope of her intention. One is certain she is familiar with the literature: it would take another kind of book entirely to furnish a diagram of the manner in which she dealt with this literature and the process by which she had come to her own acceptances. She contents herself with presenting her own view as vividly as she can. And it is this very abstension from critical debate that makes possible the dynamic, lifelike portraiture she achieves.

If we limit the consideration to the author's own intentions, there is, however, one serious defect in the book.

It is a pity that it should be marred by the skimpy chapters on Coleridge's childhood. The author ought to have taken up the take at the point where it really began for her: with Coleridge and Southey dreaming their boyish dream of a Utopia along the Susquehanna—all this, of course, before Southey's apostasy to middle-class comforts and safe penning. The opening chapters are only a moderately successful literary exercise in dishing up pre-digested knowledge, poky writing that in no way prepares you for the cold plunge to come. But this is perhaps carping in view of the fact that she has had the courage of her creative imagination the rest of the way.

There are humor and pathos for moderns in the quaint manner in which the Southseys railroaded the reluctant Coleridge into a marriage for pantisocracy's sake. There is an inescapable verity in the treatment of Coleridge's worship of Mary Lewis: the boy preferred his dream of woman to a real one; the "damsel with a dulcimer" defeated Mary Lewis, but was ineffective against the concrete, comfortably domestic Sara. And if he thus escaped committing himself to a woman, he fell all the more certainly into the toils of his great love, Mr. Wordsworth. The same loving insight plays about the human life of Dorothy Wordsworth, Sara Coleridge, Mary Hutchinson, Annette Vallon and Charles Lamb, the whole illustrious cast.

You come to be grateful for Charles Lamb. Like an angel of mercy, this balanced, civilized man sparkles across the sad, doomed pages of the book, as he came into Coleridge's life, all too seldom. If this book is true, and you feel that it is infallibly, Lamb's understanding was all of that rare human benison that Coleridge ever encountered in his lifetime. He seems to have been the only man

in all England who was capable of cherishing Coleridge as Coleridge had a special gift for cherishing others. Prefiguring *Farewell the Banner*, he is the spirit of Frances Winwar brooding over Coleridge's own life.

And now I come to something that would be difficult to convey in any space: I can only suggest it. I spoke of charting the course by which Mrs. Winwar arrived at this understanding of Coleridge. To me, it is Blakean in both method and spirit. From the fact that she could not resist dragging Blake's printshop into the picture of Coleridge's school-days when there was admittedly not a shred of evidence that Coleridge even knew of Blake's existence, I deduce that Mrs. Winwar is in fact a Blakean scholar. But even if she is not, she has Blake's view of life—she "corrects" Freud with Blake, and that is a progression long overdue in our literature and in our world. I have listened for such an accent among the novelists of today, and found them making a mumble about Fascists in heat, rather than clear statement about men and women in love; or grinding out Freudian materialism without any leaven of hope for man's tremendous modern struggle to attain the harmony of a new relationship. Mrs. Winwar may never write a novel, but *Farewell the Banner* is novel enough to show the way to a new renaissance in the novel-form.

Had this book's recognizably Freudian point of view not been tempered by something quite beyond-Freudianism, it would have as little power to move its readers deeply as *Mourning Becomes Electra* possessed. It would have been a coolly detached detailing of predestined dusty answers. The difference consists in Miss Winwar's effort to believe in, to love truly, the very hopes and dreams that subsequently were betrayed. The whole force of the story is based upon one's acceptance of the fact that Coleridge was indeed at the beginning of a great poetic career when he was brought to earth, like his own albatross, by an ignorant, indifferent, and essentially mischievous arrow.

Now it may be far-fetched to imagine that Coleridge could have written an allegory prophesying his own failure, in the days of his high ambition and strongest happiness. But Coleridge's blind adoration of and dependence upon another poet makes a poignant story. It was a fault of too much, rather than too little, humanity—and humanity is what it takes to make a poet, as well as, I may point out, what it takes to make a book.

by W. S. K.

## SWEETNESS AT 42

*"We each have a complex," he said.  
"Mine is that my uniform embarrasses you;  
yours is that I'd rather be somewhere else  
when I'm here."*

—THE SAILOR TO IRWIN EDMAN  
PHILOSOPHER'S HOLIDAY, P. 49

PHILOSOPHER'S HOLIDAY. By Irwin Edman. New York: The Viking Press. 1938. Pp. 270.

Whoever thinks of Columbia University, situated as it is on the left bank of the Subway going South, as a place of monkish reliques? Who would suspect that it could be the nursery of a soul so gentle, so serene, so composed as that of Irwin Edman? Some years ago, it is true, Mr. Edman wrote *The Contemporary and his Soul* which attempted to compete with *The Modern Temper*, written by his Columbia colleague, Joseph Wood Krutch. But, though Mr. Edman's version was a *suspiria de profundis*, it was a melody unheard.

Something there is which is very flattering and comforting in being admitted to a philosopher's intimacies under the lure of going with him on holiday. Yet, though *Philosopher's Holiday* does indeed record some luminous moments of Mr. Edman's enviable and passionate pilgrimages in Europe, wherever Mr. Edman is geographically, he is still at home and still Mr. Edman. He may have hoped, in his original intention when he contemplated *Philosopher's Holiday*, to skip off with the raggle-taggle-gypsies-O!, leaving philosophy to take care of itself during his absence, but he did not quite succeed, any more than he succeeded, despite a prefatory disclaimer, in avoiding Proustian reveries.

"Philosophy", Mr. Edman defines in another recent book, "... is in some way and in some degree a personal or private view of the world. . . an approach to things and to things in their context and wholeness." *Philosopher's Holiday* presents Mr. Edman's context

and wholeness. It supplies the sachet of his winsome and perhaps pale soul which suffuses the array of his other impressive stylistic creations: *Richard Kane Looks at Life*; *Adam, the Baby, and the Man from Mars*; *The Mind of Paul*; and *Four Ways of Philosophy*. An inconsequential reviewer, slightly tintured with sprightliness, might innocently inquire if "Philosopher's Holiday" might not be stretched to cover *all* of Mr. Edman's exquisitely-turned prose?

For all of his books, however plausibly philosophical they may appear, convincingly confirm Mr. Edman's personal or private view of the world, as revealed in *Philosopher's Holiday*. Certainly, it illuminates the housebroken hero-saint of *The Mind of Paul*. Mr. Edman thinks of himself as a "philosopher" because he teaches philosophy; but what he has published so far as "philosophy" seems to be more like the sugared icing of a bon-bon. It is a sustained and sedative soliloquy of an amiable essayist, reflectively fastidious, whose conjectural flights are few and inhibited, and whose favorite flourish is the orchestration of philosophical systems with analogies of music and poetry. Somewhere in his book, Mr. Edman discovers his disposition to reflective thinking in the fact that he has poor eyesight. Elsewhere, in the same book, he confesses his basic dualism is an oscillation between "lyricism" and "liberalism". His "lyricism" is his exquisite response to the right melodies, the approved varieties of verse and music: his "liberalism", the generous humanitarian pity and tenderness of a disciplined spirit, is on some scrutiny perilously identifiable with Laodiceanism. Actually, his dualism is an unresolved hesitation between a choice aestheticism and a sympathetic political petitionism.

Exponent of Santayana as Mr. Edman confessedly is, he has apparently not ingested his Master's "secret", frankly exposed by the latter in the essay "Hermes" in *Soliloquies in England*. Like Santayana, Mr. Edman perpetuates the hedonism of Pater: indeed, from *Philosopher's Holiday*, one pictures him a kind of Walter Pater on Amsterdam Avenue, oblivious to the automobile traffic, passionately pinioning his way to tranquility: serenely enjoying the light refracted from great philosophers, and sporting like a trained seal in a glassed pool of ideas, immune from the *mores* of Manhattan. Hence, *Philosopher's Holiday* stabilizes. It soothes. It is a nocturne. It evokes Mr. Edman's notion that

philosophy is a mystic elevation of a verbal chalice, achieving a sacerdotal purgation and prophylaxis by dulcet incantations to Plato, Spinoza, and Santayana. In it, Mr. Edman finds occasion, sufficiently often, to say "Plato" in a way that inevitably makes one swoon. What he offers is the philosophy of the purr.

An effect of simulated senility pervades the pages of *Philosopher's Holiday*. But can a modern philosopher write a *De Senectute* at the ripe age of forty-two? Mr. Edman has not intentionally posed as an abortive ancient; and yet, in an era when testaments of youth are supplanting manuals for growing old gracefully, he has succeeded in revealing himself in *Philosopher's Holiday* as becoming also a Rabbi Ben Ezra. Perhaps, in this day of imminent doom, we need anodynes, and if we do, *Philosopher's Holiday* efficaciously succeeds. Perhaps its author never was possessed by Matthew Arnold's sage observation that "calm's not life's crown, though calm is well!". His book evokes a mood of quietness in the midst of tension: an ambience of gentle confidence which is pleasantly confusable with the traditional Christian idea of faith. Not even Isaiah was so desperately determined to be calm: not even when he said: "In returning and in rest shall ye be saved: in quietness and in confidence shall be thy strength." Mr. Edman's souvenir of his holiday satisfies dormant desires for the contemplative life in the midst of a day of fevered anxiety and anguish. It posits a point of rest in a time which he himself might describe as a fugue of dialectical materialism. It becomes, in effect, an "O altitudo!"

The altitude of calm which *Philosopher's Holiday* attains is no factitious pose of its author. The book displays the miracle of how a young New Yorker, of a susceptible docility, submitted to the actions of rigorous teachers who seized his youth, trimmed its lamp and purged its fire, showed him the high white star of Truth; there bade him gaze, and there aspire. Emergent, he glows though he does not shine. The result is a comforting apologetic for the subsidized intellectual exquisite, immune from the impacts of turmoil; and mute to the murmurs of a thousand years. Tears are not in his eyes. Only too obviously one is tempted, on laying

down the beautifully-written *Philosopher's Holiday*, to mumble to oneself Goethe's diagnosis: "Es bildet sich ein Talent in der Stille: ein Charakter sich im Strom der Welt."

Could Mr. Edman be among those who think they are mature because at 42 they are very sweet?

*by Frances Wentworth Knickerbocker*

### FROM THESE ROOTS

THE IDEAS THAT HAVE MADE MODERN LITERATURE. By Mary M. Colum. 286 pp. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

A learned and a brilliant lady has rushed in where professors fear to tread: she has attempted to isolate and trace the ideas that are the roots of modern literature. Defining literary criticism as "the creation of profound, informing, and transforming ideas about literature and life", she has chosen as the great creative critics who have changed literature Lessing and Herder, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Sainte-Beuve and Taine. Present-day critics, she implies, have been living on the ideas of these originators without even knowing where they came from: the Marxists have taken over a social criticism that goes back to Madame de Staël's theory of literature as an expression of society. And perhaps if we had remembered more of Lessing's teaching of the boundary between the arts, we might have been spared some of the confusions of Imagism and Surrealism.

But to try to derive the complex movements of modern literature from the ideas of six critics is inevitably to oversimplify, even to distort. It is, for instance, far too simple to say that modern literature begins with Lessing and Herder, for nothing in literature "begins" like that. Lessing was a great creator, but he was also heir to the ideas of Aristotle and Winckelmann and Diderot. And as

for saying that the literature of his time had "lost the breath of life," there was in Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, published six years before *Minna von Barnhelm*, the mighty wind of an emotion that inspired Goethe's *Werther* and swept all Europe.

To oversimplify the relations of Wordsworth and Coleridge is even more misleading. The unwary reader might gather from Mrs. Colum's account that because Coleridge read and admired Lessing therefore Wordsworth wrote the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. (A few more dates would have been helpful anchors both for the reader and for the author; they would have kept her from saying that the Preface of 1800 was written "long after" the poems of 1798.) Actually Coleridge's own critical theory was far more deeply influenced by Kant and Schelling than by Lessing. And as for Wordsworth, his great Preface was the flowering of that whole spiritual experience that owed so little to any literary theory. To say, as Mrs. Colum does, that his idea of poetry was but slightly influenced by his experience of the French Revolution is to ignore the evidence not only of scholars like Professor Harper, M. Cestre, and Professor de Selincourt, but of *The Prelude* itself: Wordsworth's own record of his transformation of revolutionary ideas into a new imaginative vision of "the deep heart of man." Mrs. Colum shows the greatness of the Preface and of that most difficult and fascinating of critical essays, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. But she does not make clear the differences between the two theories: Wordsworth finding in the language and feelings of common life the essential poetry that Coleridge sought in the mind of the thinker: Wordsworth sketching the branches of poetry, Coleridge following, as he put it, to the roots.

Mrs. Colum traces with admirable clearness the course through the nineteenth century of the critical movement toward the expression of every-day life and of the common man. She shows Sainte-Beuve as the master of the psychological method, the father of modern biography; Taine as the first experimenter in a scientific system, a precise psychological technique. She draws some striking parallels between Baudelaire's poems of men and women of the city streets, and Wordsworth's poems of country folk. But again one feels that in presenting Baudelaire as the inheritor, through Sainte-

Beuve, of the great German and English critics, she is cutting him to fit her thesis. And she surely overstates Emerson's debt to Coleridge and Lessing for the ideas that started an independent American literature.

Even as realism declined after Flaubert and Balzac and Zola, Turgenev and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, into uninspired materialism and the slice-of-life, a reaction set in. Mrs. Colum's fine chapter on the revolt of Rimbaud and Verlaine and the Symbolists, of Proust and Joyce, seems to belie her assertion that we are still living wholly on outworn ideas. She is so determined to show the influence, deadening though it may have become, of the elder critics that she will not see any creative stirrings among contemporary critics. (Her division of writers of our time into artists, trade-writers, amateurs, seems a bit futile. Was not every artist once an amateur, and were not Shakespeare and Dickens trade-writers?) If there are any first-rate critical minds in America, she pictures them either locked up in remote colleges instructing youth or wasting their powers reviewing third-rate trade-writers. Yet one can think of critics who have surmounted even these barriers. And there are living critics, like I. A. Richards, himself a distinguished interpreter of Coleridge, and T. S. Eliot, who surely deserve the name creative. Indeed if Mrs. Colum believes Taine at all, she must admit that American literature too will spring from its own milieu and moment and not merely from past ideas.

In contrast to her clear concept of criticism as the creation of transforming ideas—which is Arnold in modern dress—Mrs. Colum is so anxious to escape from the rest of Arnold's formula, “the best that has been known and thought in the world”, that she falls into the dilemma of describing literature as the history of *everything* that has been known and thought, and then tries to limit the *everything* to “all human experiences that have inherent in them sufficient emotion, imagination, vitality to make them significant.” But if everything is “significant”, nothing is. If she were as sure of the art of literature as she is of the value of criticism, she would not so often leave us questioning.

*From These Roots* has been described as the type of book which could not have been written outside of America. This seems a

rather hard saying—especially of a book that is itself so hard on America. But America need not apologize for a book which, with all its overemphasis, does present the high rôle of criticism in shaping the literature and life of a people, and so makes us more ready, more eager, for the new liberalizing ideas that will make literature.

by *Merrill Moore*

### MIRRORS OF VENUS

**MIRRORS OF VENUS.** A novel in sonnets, 1914-1938. By John Wheelwright. Bruce Humphries, Incorporated, Boston 1938. Pages 88, \$2.50.

Astonishing things are happening to the sonnet and are being done with the sonnet (witness E. E. Cummings). This book is an example. Not only are the individual "sonnets" unique in form and content but the use to which the author has put them in this book is unique and also unique is the manner in which he has used them. Complete originality is the outstanding characteristic of John Wheelwright's newest book. Originality of a kind that is refreshing and rewarding.

As its subtitle states, this book is a novel, not a novel in the sense that it competes with *Anthony Adverse*, let us say, but a novel in the full literary sense of that word. Something new and interestingly arresting. It is a novel that might be compared with *God's Man* by Lynd Ward who composed the first novel of woodcuts. Mr. Wheelwright has composed his of sonnets, sonnets with which great liberties have been taken (if one limits oneself to conventional concepts of the sonnet form) but liberties that are creative and revealing and that at no time exceed his poetic license that is almost predicated 1939 (New York World Fair—

trylow!) in which respect it is doubly amazing that from conservative Boston should come such a shower of modernity.

*Mirrors of Venus* is not for thin-skinned readers who want pap or paper-shelled poems. They are intellectually tough, subtle, sometimes cryptic, often highly personal yet usually stimulating. They are enormously concentrated and full of dynamic psychological vitality.

A separate essay could be written about their innovation in form but that will be much better done one hundred years from now by an academician for his doctorate dissertation in the year 2038, if colleges still exist as they may by this *vis inertiae*.

But suffice it to say that this is a book in which the poet reads and talks and discusses his poems, sandwiched between critical and explanatory notes (always on the left hand page) are thirty-one sonnets intricately arranged in a natural psychological sequence. The reader is allowed to supply some of the parts. The main characters are: the poet's friends, different parts of the poet's personality (that speak and act with the dignity of a Greek drama) and events and circumstances in the author's life. That for the purposes of the book are in a sense personalized.

*Mirrors of Venus* has a dual form. In addition to being a novel in sonnets it is a long poem in sonnet or (quasi-sonnet) stanzas. Thanks to Sherry Mangan it is beautifully and intelligently printed.